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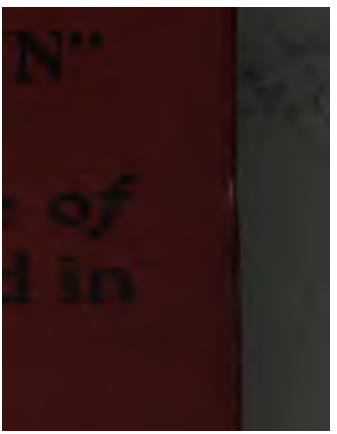
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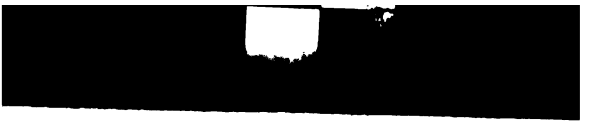
James Buckley
2nd June 1903

"CROPPIES LIE DOWN"



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A TALE OF IRELAND IN '98

BY

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LONDON
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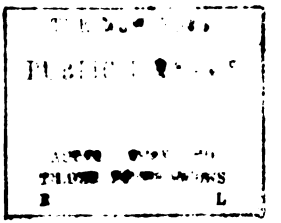
3 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN
1903



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Dedication

TO MY FATHER, THE LATE WILLIAM FRANCIS BUCKLEY.

To You

IN TOKEN OF IRREPARABLE LOSS, AND OF ENDURING SORROW,
THESE PAGES OF OUR COUNTRY'S STORY
ARE OFFERED, WITH THE UNDYING HOPE
THAT WE MAY MEET AGAIN

CORK, 1902.

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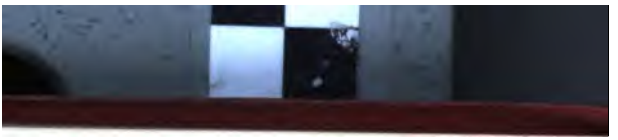

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PART I

CHAPTER I

THE shimmering Slaney waters were radiant with many blended tints of sunset splendour as a cloudless day in May came to a fitting and most perfect close. The murmuring of bees in wayside gardens, the lowing of homeward-coming herds, and the faint, fitful bleating of distant flocks melted upon the ear into one harmony of sound which was but the expression of the peace that lay like a benediction on gilded plain and wood-crowned hill.

So pastoral a landscape seemed to have the power of assimilating to itself the most discordant elements, even the gold-laced scarlet coat of a gentleman who came slowly riding down the Enniscorthy road appeared to grow less blatant amid the wealth of varying shades, and suit itself, like the pace of his steed, to the tranquil spirit of the hour and place. He was still a young man, wearing, instead of the more general peruke, his own hair touched with untimely white to a tint resembling the grey of his boots now powdered by the dust of his journey. His features were clear-cut and aquiline; the close-shaven lips had already taken a downward curve at the corners, the significant line thence to the arched nostril being pronounced enough to be characteristic; while the jaw, sharply outlined as he looked round carelessly from time to time, told, like the eye, of steadfast courage and iron will.

The road which he was following skirted the right bank of the river though within the last half hour it had diverged considerably until a point was reached where taking a short angle, it branched off in different directions.

Making a quick gesture of impatience, the rider drew up, and turning in the saddle, rested his hand upon the horse's croup, as if striving to recollect something he had forgotten rather than to seek for counsel.

Had he desired the latter it would have been forthcoming, for he had hardly halted thus a minute when a shrill voice piped out—"Arrah, is it anything yer haner lost, at all, at all? Sure those riding cloaks are no good for carrying things; there now, one of the straps is loose, maybe it's out of that yer haner dropped it? Poor horsey, good horsey, oh then, 'tis you're handsome with the white star on yer forehead, an' the blue saddle-cloth an' the goold on it!"

This latter apostrophe was delivered to the steed after a few moments' interval, for the mounted man apparently took no more notice of that addressed to him than if it had been the faint cawing of the crows floating lazily overhead. He however mechanically adjusted the light valise strapped upon the crupper, and putting one hand carelessly in his pocket, looked down.

Just in front was an old woman, and as she encountered his glance she ducked with a comical little curtsy that received no acknowledgment. She had never been tall, and now her hooped back reduced her size pitifully, giving to her carriage a mincing deliberation as out of keeping with the peasant shawl and skirt she wore as the silver-headed Malacca cane which supported her feeble steps. Her face might have been a type of age itself, but for the piercing eyes peering upward through the loosened strands of white hair escaping from under the caul.

"Maybe yer haner lost his way?" she observed insinuatingly, "it is aisy with all them cross-roads, that wan goes on to Adamstown"——

"Ah, so it does," the stranger interrupted. "What do they call this place though?" he added, nodding towards the river.

"Sure that's Merton over there, sir," answered the

woman, glancing in the same direction, "the Gores live there, himself is commandin' in the yeomanry."

"Hum, he must be rather old for such duty now."

"Oh it isn't the father yer haner means?" cried the old woman, "Look at that now! He's dead these years; it's the young man I'm makin' bould to spake of."

"Hum—and this place yonder?"

"That's Bellevue where Mr George Ogle lives, 'tis he's the kind gentleman——"

"Bellevue? Ah, then Malplaquet cannot be far?"

"Only a half mile, sir. He's a good charitable man, Mr Neville is. 'Twas he gave me this kipeen to help my poor old bones along the road when I do be gatherin' the herbs. 'Tis he's kind to the poor an' helps 'em—an' it's helpin' they want these times. An' then out beyond that agen there's the Hermitage, where the sojers are, Mr Gash's house, though he don't live there often. If it's to Malplaquet ye are goin' the road is shorter round here by the turn"——

"But the other is the high road?"

"Iss, yer haner, an' it'll take ye there too."

"Thanks, I shall keep to it," rejoined the man crisply, tossing her a piece of silver, and rising slightly in his stirrups. The old woman pounced upon the coin and uttered a rattling string of blessings; the horseman rode on a few paces.

"May the light of Heaven be about ye till it leads ye to glory! May ye never want sight to see yerself increase! May the Heavens be yer bed this night!" The benedictions rose to a crescendo, and then began to dwindle in inverse ratio to the square of the distance between her and the donor who suddenly reined up, and looked back, one hand on a holster.

"Thanks, old dame," he cried with a grim smile. "In return, allow me to remind your friend behind the tree yonder that he must bridle his curiosity better when taking ambush; I could have shot him any time these last two

minutes, but fighting, not skulking, is my trade." And waving a negligent hand, he cantered off round the bend of the road.

The old woman stared, motionless, the speech frozen on her half-open mouth, her wrinkled lips puckered into a most woful expression of discomposure, and before she had recovered herself, a young man got lightly, albeit a little shamefacedly, over a neighbouring fence and stood beside her, glancing sharply up and down the silent ways.

The old woman looked fondly at him, and then burst into a wheezing laugh. "Well," she said, nodding her head in the direction the traveller had taken, "an' isn't he the devil? Sure he was watchin' me all the time I thought! Ye kept mighty quiet, for faith I didn't hear ye myself!"

The young man frowned. "I believed I could get here by the short cut," he replied, "but when I saw the scarlet above the hedge, I knew there was need for caution." And drawing a silver-mounted pistol he carefully shook the powder in the pan.

Though young, there was something tried and proven about him, his voice and bearing suggested breeding, or at least education, the firm energy of his glance, promptitude and daring.

"Faith, he was a fool, for all," the old woman went on, as she observed her companion, "because if he knew who was hiding behind that same tree, he'd think twice before he'd let him go."

The other shrugged his shoulders, the implied compliment completely restoring his equanimity. "Oh," he said carelessly, "as the gentleman's trade *is* fighting not skulking, in spite of his scarlet coat, we shall meet again soon, and then we shall see, please God, who takes cover first. But come, Nancy, have you anything for me?"

"Wisha I have, good news too," replied the woman fumbling in her pocket. "I saw Miss Irene only this last half hour. An' 'tis she's the beauty! Her cheeks

were like roses, an' her mouth like 'twould be after ye painted it to a shape with one of them brushes she makes pictures with; an' the eye-brows! an' the diamonds in her ears weren't brighter than the light in her eyes; an' then the bussum—smothered in lace! An' the velvet ribband about her neck! An' the perfume coming out from her pink an' silver gown! Mother of God, it made me cry to look at her—thinkin' of what I am an' what I was. Sure they used to call me the Rose of Inistiogue!"

"Yes, yes, what did she say, Nancy?"

The old woman drying her eyes chuckled at the eagerness of the question. "She did not say much at first," she replied, "but, didn't she fill up when I told her about your bein' in hidin', and the yeos on yer track!"

"She wept!" said the young man softly.

"Aye that she did—salt tears," answered the woman stoutly. "An' she'd cry worse only I made bould to say, 'For God's sake, mind yer eyes, Miss.' 'An' oh,' says she, 'why don't he go away from the croppies, sure my father would get him a pardon aisy?' 'Oh, Miss Irene, he'd never do that,' says I, 'for he'd rather be like a hunted deer on the mountains, an' sometimes get a glimpse of yer face, than be a jook in France or Americay.' Then she reddened up and plucked a rose from the bush by the window. I was talkin' to her outside the dining-room on the lawn. 'Tell him,' she says, 'I'm not insinsible to his devotion'—they were her very words—'tell him to keep away from Malplaquet too, for we're expectin' Major Heathcote from Enniscorthy'"——

"Heathcote? The dragoon?" interrupted the young man, his face hardening. "Can he be the military inspector they talk of? He was at Carlow a few days ago."

"Iss," replied the woman, "the very same. He was all over the world beside, in Inja an' France—he's a divil."

"He is a devil, Nancy," cried the young man, "if the

stories about his regiment be true, but he has roused other devils, and when he meets Frank Devereux"——

"Wisha, by my soul I'm thinkin' he's after doin' that just now," answered the woman composedly, "for in spite of the years an' the scarlet coat I knew him the minnit I clapped eyes on him, because I used be doin' of odd jobs about Malplaquet every day them times an' many a day I saw him, a quick, quiet little gorsoon, runnin' about with her in the orchard. He is English, but the family went back to England long after the father died here, an' he went sojerin'. There's no one left but himself now I believe. Wisha, no wonder he didn't know me!"

There was a pause. The other passed his hand across his brow, the sudden fury dying out of voice and eye. "Well, what did you say, Nancy?" he asked wistfully.

"Wisha, only that all the King's horses an' all the King's men wouldn't keep you away," she replied.

"And that it would be the last time I should seek an interview? Did you say that?"

"Iss, to be sure, oh I remembered every word, an' said it like a catechism. An' all of a suddint she began talkin' about a tweed I spun last month, for Miss Phaire came into the room jinglin' her keys, an' then she slipped away soon. Then, I had to stay talkin' soft talk to my lady, an' not a thraneen at the end of it. Well, but just as I was comin' out by the yard-door Miss Irene came to me an' gave me this bit of paper, an' she says: 'At half-past nine, but he must wait by the laurels, at the orchard gate—an' he must not stay long.' You see she wants you to come in order to warn you how dangerous it is to be comin'."

The young man snatched the envelope she proffered, and kissed it passionately. "I shall be there, Nancy," he said, when he had glanced over the contents, "though all Joclyn's fox-hunters were at my heels. And," he added laughingly, "I shall not wait for dark either."

He was silent, perusing the letter again, the woman stood by him, with uplifted finger, listening.

"Hah, there's a carriage," she said presently, "the Gores, I suppose; Miss Fanny is comin' from Dublin to-day I hear. Well, I'll be goin' now, but where will you be?"

The other smiled. "Oh, I have much business to transact before I reach Malplaquet," he replied as he turned away. The old woman hobbled after him.

"When will it be?" she asked hoarsely, laying a hand upon his arm.

He put it by gently, "Not to-day, nor perhaps to-morrow, Nancy," he answered with a bitter smile. "The mail coach passed here to-day, and while it runs the sands in the glass are running too."

The woman with a little sigh and a half quizzical glance gathered her bag to her breast, and slowly hobbled off. He stood watching her a few moments and then putting his foot in a broken part of the wall, prepared to recross a leafy thicket at a short distance, but paused, a light, swift footfall coming to his ear. His hand went to the concealed pistol, and stepping back he waited.

As if at a signal, another man appeared at the curve of the road, walking rapidly in his direction. He was dressed in rusty black, wore half boots of the same colour, and carried himself with an alertness of bearing that was distinctly military, as he stepped forward looking apparently neither to the left nor the right. Devereux made no sign, but standing there motionless, watched him approach. As he drew near the man lifted his hat, showing a closely cropped head, and said—"I know 'U'."

Devereux started, but lifting his own replied, "I know N."

"I know I," answered the new-comer.

"I know T," rejoined Devereux.

"I know E," responded the man in black.

"I know D," continued Devereux.

"I know I," began the man after a slight pause.

"I know R," said Devereux.

"I know I," replied the other, "which if not good grammar, is sound patriotism. I daresay you will excuse me the rest, Mr Devereux?"

For answer, the latter broke a twig from the hawthorn bush near, and held it aloft. "Where did this branch grow?" he asked.

"In France."

"Where was it watered?"

"In America."

"Where will you plant it?"

"In the crown of Great Britain!"

The young man tossed the little branch aside, and extended his hand. "We must be careful in those times," he said. "You are the gentleman about whom Mr Reynolds wrote?"

"The same, Mr Stephen Harrigan, at your service," replied the other. "I have a few letters of marque—introduction—ha, ha, to your people here," he continued, producing some envelopes; "and I have been wishful to meet you for a week past, but I might as well be looking for a needle in a bottle of straw."

Devereux smiled, and broke a seal. "Wexford is twenty-nine miles by twenty," he observed, "yet I assure you I find the limit contract to a most inconvenient straitness, the government net is a large one."

"But, like the cloth of honour, woven somewhat loosely here and there," laughed Harrigan. "At any rate your topographical knowledge must be improved by your wanderings."

The young man laughed. "Most of the time I was between Taghmon and Wexford," he said.

"Hah, on the lookout for the frigates?"

The other nodded.

"I am afraid our transport service has been rather disorganised by Lord Edward's arrest?" continued Harrigan, taking a pinch of snuff. And he began to hum—"There are ships upon the sea."

"By the way you have seen service, sir?" he added after a pause, watching the other's preoccupied face narrowly.

"Yes, in Spain and afterwards in Italy," replied Devereux, without lifting his head from the letter before him.

"Well, as a military man, what do you think of our chances in Wexford?"

"Honestly, I am not very sanguine," replied Devereux, refolding a missive, "the Uniteds have no real hold here, the people are fairly well off, nor is there any bitter feeling between the various classes. On the other hand since the district was proclaimed things have changed, the applicants for arms are more numerous, though totally undisciplined, and with the exception of myself absolutely without practical guidance; I cannot devote the time necessary to their training in even the rudiments of the exercise, for as you are doubtless aware, I am a proclaimed traitor and consequently my address at present is exceedingly uncertain."

"Hah, but at any rate they are showing signs of disaffection. We could easily give them cause for more by getting a few things done if not in the King's name, ha, ha, at least in the name of the local aristocracy?"

"You mean to manufacture rebellion?" said Devereux slowly, with a questioning look.

"Aye," replied the other coolly. "What else is Mr Pitt doing? Imitation is the sincerest flattery." And he drew forefinger and thumb down either side of his mouth, as if to quiet the quivering muscles.

"I fear, Mr Harrigan, that you misunderstand our movement wofully," answered Devereux coldly. "If we had no wrongs we would not be justified in our appeal to arms, those grievances are not patent to the great masses of the people who are as ignorant as animals. Moreover, their clergy are absolutely opposed to us—you remember a Bishop Moylan's letter a few years ago—

Our only hope has been to teach them gradually by educating them to a sense of their rights. This is hard, for the majority are Catholics who by the bigoted jealousy of their own countrymen have been kept in ignorance until now there are not many who can read or write. They are unrepresented in Parliament, they have no idea of national life; they are nothing better than serfs, and I fear they will not think until they get the serf's provocation—till they see their women in the grasp of the soldiery, and their roofs blazing above them. Then, it will be too late."

"All the more reason for anticipating the English?"

"Mere revenge is hardly the emotion to rely upon for such an effort as I see must be made, for, Mr Harrigan, I know something of revolution."

"It's a devilish good motive, egad, all the same. It gave Tarentum trouble, if I remember ancient history. But, to business—I am, I understand, to make a report of our resources here. Lord Edward was to have come —see here is my commission signed by him, you know his handwriting?"

"Yes," replied Devereux, taking the paper and glancing over it, "you have received an excellent character here, Mr Harrigan. His Lordship says you have seen service —where, may I ask?"

"In America. His Lordship won some distinction there, I had the honour of serving under his command."

"Oh, indeed, allow me to congratulate you—the handwriting appears a trifle shaky."

"It might well be so; that letter was written in a loft off Thomas Street, just before Sirr and the others tracked him down; he is not doing well they say, but Ryan's worse, his death is expected hourly. If he dies it will go hard with Lord Edward, though the Duke of York may do something, he has great respect for him I believe."

"So has every man of honour, no matter what his

opinions," answered Devereux, "but from what I see around me, neither the Duke, nor the King himself count for much. He says here that I am to present you to our Wexford organisation—well, I shall be happy to do so, though I warn you not to expect great things. You know the Hermitage?"

The other nodded, smiling a little. "Near Malplaquet House?" he said.

"Yes, about a mile distant. Well, there is between the two an excellent spot, admirably adapted for the exercise, called Rourk's Field, and may be easily found as it adjoins a place called Doorley's quarry. I shall be happy to present you to our staff there to-night, the hour will be twelve."

"Good, I shall not forget. By the way," he continued as he replaced the commission Devereux returned, in a large pocket-book, "I met a gentleman in scarlet just now, and had a little conversation with him, do you happen to know who he was? He passed this way."

"Yes, one Heathcote, a military inspector."

"Ecod, Mr Devereux, you seem to know a good deal. So that's the tansy! We must watch him, he is dangerous."

"But not so dangerous as others," laughed the soldier, and at the words a huge, lumbering coach reeled into sight, its new varnish flashing resplendently in the sunlight. As it passed a shrill scream rang from the interior, the outlaw lifted his hat.

"Mrs Gore and son," he said, laughing and nodding at the retreating vehicle, "one of our local militia and his respected mother—'Elegance and easy like a shoeblack in a noddy.' Let us move a little further on, perhaps Mr Gore may return and arrest me, he has sworn to do so—on the first, ahem, available opportunity."

"Ecod, you are a cool one!" the other man blurted out, laughing harshly, but immediately checking himself, he added in a respectful tone, "If anything should

prevent you from coming to the *rendezvous* to-night, where am I to inquire for the other members?"

"Have you heard of a Mrs Kitty Creagh?"

Harrigan started, the corners of his mouth dropping. "I did," he said hoarsely.

"They have a farm near the Hermitage, and another at Taghmon. If you are in any difficulty apply to her and she will give you what information you may require."

The other bent his brows above his red eyes and stood for a moment silent, the sun turning the yellow of his cheek to a swarthier hue while he strove to read the face of his companion who looked at him with equal steadiness. "Then Kitty Creagh is?"—he began slowly.

"Our best friend," rejoined Devereux crisply. "From that you will understand how easy it is for me to keep myself posted on military matters."

"Why, her cousin is in Hunt's cavalry—she is sutler herself, or how do you call it? to Plornish and the rest at the Hermitage."

"Exactly; permit me to compliment you on your accurate knowledge. Ah, another? Well, I must be on my way."

They had now reached a gap in the wall whence the thicket stretched away across the fields at right angles, the road being visible for a considerable distance, upon it a single horseman was quietly riding.

"Do you see that man?" continued Devereux softly. Harrigan nodded, putting his hand over his mouth as before.

"Well," said the outlaw in measured accents, "if you ever wish to know who wrote the letter which hood-winked the United Irishmen when the French were waiting in Bantry Bay, ask Mr Philip Gash, gambler, forger and spy. Dangerous as you may think yonder red-coat to be, the deadliest of all the brutes who prey on this unhappy land are such as he."

Harrigan's mouth twitched though his teeth glistened a second on the under-lip, then his brows drew together, and he raised his hand ceremoniously in acknowledgment of Devereux's lifted hat. The next moment the outlaw disappeared amid the underwood and left him thus, frowning against the sunlight on that sunny road where the single horseman was looming nearer, the handle of his riding switch to his chin while he hummed a careless tune.

As Major Heathcote pursued his journey the route swept inward again towards the river, and soon he saw its dancing waters twinkle in the shadow of the pines. The course of the road now bounded on one side by a stone wall, led him to a nobly designed gateway opening upon an avenue of stately elms whose foliage chequered the approach to a country house of Jacobean type.

As he rode on a gentleman hastily descended the steps before the hall door.

"Hey, Ralph, my lad," he cried, "so you did not lose your way! I sent Mat to meet you, but as he went by the short cut ye must have missed. I would have gone myself, but the mare is badly foundered and with the exception of Irene's cob, the other horses are doing yeoman service egad."

"Oho, you anticipate fighting then, before this affair is adjusted?" replied the soldier as they shook hands.

"Apparently," rejoined the older man, answering the tone of the voice rather than the words, "but 'tween you and me, Major, the foe has a most wonderful talent at invisibility. You will be as heartily sick of him as I am if you meet some of our local colonels during your visit. Well, well, all's one for that. Here, Jerry," he continued, addressing a shambling raw-boned fellow in dilapidated livery who had come up grinning to lead the charger away, "remember what I said about the oats—Don't mind your boots," he went on, "the women are all for men in boots those times, Jenny and Phyllis will have

that taste of dust off in a twinkling." And he indicated two smiling maids who appeared at the doorway, each bearing a long-handled brush.

Nodding frankly to the curtsying girls, the soldier ascended the flight, slipping his sword from the frog in order to place it on the seven-branched antlers in the hall, supporting already a multitude of whips and canes.

"Ah, sir, how well I recollect," he said as the deft hand-maidens busied themselves on gold lace and lacquered leather, "when my head could barely rise to that!" And he touched one of the fronds.

"Ecod, now it's little more than your belt," laughed the host, "dear, dear, how times flies! The fellow that once carried those fine branches on his own head was a dashing young buck in the days when St Patrick was discoursing King Laeghaire's daughters at the well on the sides of Cruchan. Little he thought, poor beast, they'd be fished out of the Bog of Itty to serve for a hall stand—'tis a queer world, Ralph. You'll find the little maid you used to carry pick-a-back across the trout stream, up to your shoulder now—Faith yes, and more, grown out of all conscience egad."

"But not out of mind," said the young man gallantly, as a girl's clear accents sounded on the stairway. "I should know those tones anywhere—am I right?"

"Come on," laughed Neville, "seeing is believing. Else we may hear her telling Miss Prue that the Ninth are the most bashful dogs in existence."

Laughing still, he led the way to a spacious drawing-room commanding an exquisite view where wood and water, and undulating pasture land mingled to realise a scene of idyllic loveliness.

Here they were received by a lady clad in the rich costume of an earlier time. "My wife's sister, Miss Prudence Phaire," said Neville. "She will not be offended if I say that I regret another is not here to do the honours, my boy," he added with a swift glance at a

portrait over the fireplace, representing a beautiful lady in patch and furbelow, "but God disposes! We got your letter of condolence from France—very nice indeed, and that quotation from Cicero—you did not forget your Latin. Ah, well, she left us something more than a memory."

CHAPTER II

At this moment the room was entered by a young girl whose gracefully rounded form looked more youthful still in its robes of diaphanous white modelled on the pseudo-classical fashion known as the Directorate. Neville advanced and took her by the hand.

"You will hardly require to be presented here, Heathcote," he said, "there stands your little playmate of—was it twenty years ago? Upon my life, I am afraid to remember! Do you recollect the day you fell through the roof of my orangery, you rogue, climbing after peaches we were keeping for the dinner we gave to the Viceroy's cousin, because none other would serve her ladyship's turn? Ecod, I thought your neck was broken."

The soldier laughed and kissed the little hand the girl extended while his ardent eyes looked into hers with such a sudden light of pleasure and surprise that she dropped her own, even as she bade him welcome.

"Pray, sir, did you meet any rebels on the road?" asked Miss Phaire as the party seated themselves.

"Upon my life, madam, not one," answered Heathcote arranging his cravat, "the only souls I encountered were an old woman, and a fellow who hid behind a tree when he saw me coming. Oh, yes, and a gallows-faced rogue in black, like a Popish priest turned highwayman, who wanted to take service with me."

"We live here in terror of our lives," said the lady composedly putting one mittened hand over the other, "all the servants are armed and we have double shutters on the windows."

"Tut, Prudence," replied Neville laughing, "you will frighten the Major away from us! I tell you, Heathcote, the poor devils are not so bad as they are painted. I go about all day without so much as a pistol in my pocket, nor, I assure you, can I see what the Government means by sending troops here, there, and everywhere, and giving free quarters all through the country on a set of wretches who often cannot keep buckle and tongue together."

"Oh, brother," said Miss Prue, "you would have all as honest as yourself. It is when there is no apparent danger one should be most on guard; we must watch and pray, as Holy Writ says, in our relations with these people, they are willing slaves of the Popish priests who get all the young men of tolerable means or promise sent off to France, where they imbibe Popish ideas, or worse—republican ones. There was an instance of it some years ago in this very neighbourhood. A young fellow, a priest's nephew I think, and son of some sort of farmer at Adamstown, was sent abroad to be educated for a position to which neither his birth nor his fortune entitled him, with the result that he came back, a sworn foe to the Government, the companion of rebels, poachers, and United Irishmen, nor has he withheld his hand from the shedding of blood, until there is a price upon his head! Irene, my dear, see what Bridget wants."

This because the drawing-room door was stealthily opened, disclosing a highly inflamed visage, sure sign that a domestic council was needed. Irene rose and left the apartment, a welcome diversion being now effected by the arrival of the Hon. George Ogle and his wife, who were presently followed by Mrs Honoria Gibbs with her two sprightly daughters, Agatha and Lucreece.

"The best thing they could do with that spark is clap him into a marching regiment and send him to fight Boney," said Neville, taking a pinch of snuff as the newcomers grouped themselves around him, "those dare-devil fellows make the best soldiers, eh, Heathcote? Ah,

Gash, how d'ye do? Major Heathcote, Mr Gash—a writing gentleman, Ralph, one of the secretaries, you should read his thirty-nine reasons in favour of a union between Great Britain and Ireland."

"Yes, modelled on the thirty-nine articles, sir, though I can hardly hope as convincing," added a tall man clad in rich black, save for the scarlet waistcoat, a man with a keen eye and a frank manner which he must have found invaluable.

Heathcote bowed and resumed his seat. "You are quite right," he said, "they certainly are the backbone of many an English regiment."

"But, brother," cried Miss Phaire, holding up a hand to Mr Gash who had just paid her a compliment, "would it not be dangerous to drill them, they are so disaffected?"

Mr Gash laughed scornfully. "My dear madam," he said, taking up the conversation as if he had been present when it commenced, "they are disaffected enough, but they have no cohesion; they always need a tyrant, left to themselves and their own leaders, they break into factions, then you have merely to play one side against the other, and strike the balance in your own favour."

"Aye, that's the way," laughed Ogle, "divide and govern, eh?"

Heathcote laughed too. "True," he replied, "but then you helped us, sir."

"Helped you?" cried Neville.

"Yes: do you recollect what occurred at, I think, Dungannon, about four years after I left this place. Colonel Wellesley whom I met once in Holland gave me a description of the affair?"

"Aye, gad, I remember," answered Neville hastily, the easy tears starting to his eyes, "we had the ball then at our feet, sure enough."

"You had, and if it were but kicked vigorously, I should not be at Enniscorthy to-day."

Miss Phaire laughed shrilly. "We assure you, sir,"

she said, "that we are quite content with things as they are, and well pleased with any circumstance which brings us together. Personally, as a woman, I should rather trust to the King's troops than to any low rebels of volunteers."

Heathcote bent a slow, questioning glance at her, his dark, tense face relaxing into one of those sardonic smiles more significant than many words, ere it hardened again into bronze-like impassivity; Mr Gash put one hand to his lip, a ruby on it twinkled red as a drop of blood.

"Come, come, Prue," interposed Neville, fingering the decanter, "do not be so violent against the lads, are they not always polite to the ladies?"

"That is just what they are *not*!" cried Mrs Gibbs, with a laugh like the whinny of a balked mare, "there is not a particle of gallantry in the dirty wretches!"

"Oh, pardon me, do you recollect how that fellow Devereux, or whatever he calls himself, we talked of a while agone, handed Mrs Gore out of her carriage, and danced a minuet with her when he stopped the coach by Mountloftus last week?" said Neville.

"Oho, an agreeable rascal—Claude Duval!" laughed Heathcote, covertly admiring the colour on Irene's cheek as she resumed her seat beside him.

"Agreeable! But consider the audacity, Major, a low-bred man like that venturing to dance with a lady——"

At this moment a loud, not to say strident voice sounded on the stairs, the door was flung open, and a stable-boy imperfectly disguised in livery, announced Mrs and Mr Gore, then a portly dame entered with something between a flounce and a curtsy, while the company rose, and Miss Prudence hastened forward to meet her, displaying that mixture of deference and welcome so dear to the female heart.

She still clung to the fashion of an earlier date, and had arrayed her imposing form in a generous hoop which

completely eclipsed a puffy-cheeked young gentleman clad in yeomanry uniform gorgeous with unauthorised lace.

"That's 'Lamby,'" whispered Irene to Heathcote, "Nellie Bird who is coming to-morrow night, called him so because he gave her a little lamb just like himself. He has his flute too, we shall have music."

When the formalities had been observed, Mrs Gore sank into a chair, her two fat hands clasped upon where her waist ought to have been, her great eyes rolling, while Miss Prue bustled about with a vinaigrette, and "Lamby" fanned her furiously.

"Enough, enough!" she gasped, "Oh, you are too kind," this to Miss Prue, "Booby, do you want to stifle me? Cease, cease, how can I fetch my breath with all that wind in my mouth? Ah—there—ah!"

She lay back in the chair, and was plied with questions. What had occurred? What had she seen? Were the rebels coming to burn them in their beds?

"Worse, worse! I saw *him*!" sobbed the sibyl, gently tapping her foot on the carpet, with all the premonitory signs of hysteria, "and I am sure it is the same!"

"Cut her laces," said Neville anxiously, "where's the hartshorn?"

"No, no," gasped the lady, "you are too obliging; give me air!"

Miss Prue flung open the window, and the sufferer gazed out upon the tranquil scene, while the company stood around her in attitudes of respectful uneasiness.

"Whom did you see, madam?" asked Mr Gash who had watched this performance with more interest than the acting deserved.

"Devereux the white boy—the man who danced with me, and stole the blunderbuss, and the little wicker case it hangs in. He put us out of our road, for we took the short cut to avoid bloodshed, my son being so indignant, and the wheel came off the coach and we might never have got here but for having met your man, Mr Neville."

"How outrageous!" murmured Mr Gash. "I—I did not see the rascal, I came by the high road and was detained a little."

"Ah—by a black-jowled knave who was looking for service?" exclaimed Heathcote.

Mr Gash's face stood still, the hand toying with his snuff box motionless as marble, then he smiled. "No, Major," he said, "it was an old woman, she is known about here—the Rose of Inistiogue, ha, ha, though somewhat faded, the Rose of Coolmore being all the vogue now," he added with a glance at Irene who blushed faintly even to the tint of a white rose core, while her father gently patted her cheek.

"But what was this Devereux doing?" demanded Miss Prue.

"Going to jump a ditch—was it not, Harold?"

"Yes, madam," bleated "Lamby," "and if I had had my pistols ready I should have shot him like—like a centipede!"

"Would you believe it, sir?" the lady went on, thrusting out her fat arms towards Heathcote, "he stopped my carriage one evening last week, as I was returning from a rout at Miss Addington's, he and other white-boys forced my son who has been presented to you to play a minuet, which he did under my express injunction, and to it I perforce, danced, with my diamond neck-lace and pendants which I had providentially thrust into my bosom, working down to my—feet, while the other rascals stood around us, laughing and holding torches."

"Yes," added the officer, "and they stole my new hanger and pair of silver-mounted pistols with ammunition and turned my coat inside out, and cropped my head, and blackened John's face!"

"What a motiveless outrage!" said Heathcote, keeping his countenance.

"Oh, pardon me, sir, I take leave to differ from you," retorted the lady, sitting up and unfurling her fan. "There was method enough in their malignity. Doubt-

less, it had come to their knowledge that my son intended taking severe measures against them, with the concurrence of his superior officers of course, and I believe that if I had not sunk my feelings and danced the measure we should have been slaughtered in our—our gore! I read murder in their eyes!"

"Then, madam," cried Heathcote gallantly, "we must attribute your escape to the joint intervention of Terpsichore and Calliope. Music, as Mr Congreve says, has charms to soothe the savage breast, the torches of your would-be executioners paled before the brandished torch of your beauty."

"Oh, sir," rejoined Mrs Gore coquettishly considering the edge of her fan, "you are pleased to be witty."

"Upon my life, madam," replied the soldier, "I am not only witty, but wise—if speaking truth be a sign of wisdom."

And in the laughter which followed, the stentorian tones of Mat who had undergone a metamorphosis, were heard announcing the advent of Colonel Lucy and Mr King, one a retired officer, the other a yeomanry captain. They were followed by a Lieutenant Ware from Wexford, a Mr and Mrs Freeman, with Mr Poppepper, the local clergyman, and his wife, who were succeeded by Mr Blood, a young squire with the eye of a rogue and the manner of a bully on best behaviour. The scene now became more animated. The long, gilded room, its ceiling splendid with sumptuous allegory, echoed the vapid talk and frequent bursts of tinkling laughter, the mirrors caught and gave back in myriad reflections the smiling faces, the sheen of silk and polished flesh, the light of glancing eyes and sparkling jewels.

Irene, as hostess, did her duty prettily, this being the first time she had played the part before so large an andience, entertainments not being frequent at Malplaquet of late, but she contrived now and then to give Heathcote little smiles, or whispered biographical sketches of the party.

At dinner which was soon announced, he found himself beside her again, Miss Phaire taking the official position, but as the guest of the evening he was obliged to join in the talk, that presently to his disgust, turned upon the state of the country.

"It's in a frightfully demoralised condition," said the parson's fat wife, "coming hither, we met only three people who put off their hats to us, and one was a blind man led by a dog."

"How interesting!" observed Gash with the faintest leer.

"But, he did it in mistake," continued the lady, "for he howled a Papist blessing after us."

"For nothing?" queried Mr Gash.

"Which proves that he was quite as 'dark' as he was painted," laughed Ogle.

"It is all on account of the rascally United Irishmen," said Blood, "running about the country, with French emissaries and spies stirring up the people to revolt against the King and Constitution. There isn't a ball-alley in Kildare, where the trouble is now, that was not a focus for sedition."

"Well," replied Neville, busy over the wing of a snipe, "the military do not display much anxiety about their constitutions, eh, Heathcote?"

The soldier's bridled mouth relaxed a moment. "I have myself remarked some cases of over-zeal," he answered, "but the people appear to make allowances."

Mr Gash looked at the speaker in the flicker of an eye-lid, but Mrs Gore's voice broke in. "I assure you, sir, firm correction is the only thing for them," she said gravely, "they are such demi-beasts that I doubt if they feel ill-treatment, or rather judicious severity, as a civilised person would."

"You can't get a decent bit of ash anywhere," exclaimed "Lamby," "because the wretches cut down the plantations for pike-shafts."

"Well, fir saplings make a good substitute for—

triangles," retorted Ogle, "as the thickets by Mr Gash's place at the Hermitage know, so, you are quits. But, egad, the country is in a pretty state between ye."

"Really, the best thing for us all would be a union with England," remarked Mr King. "It would lift a load of responsibility off our shoulders."

"Lift?" observed Neville softly.

"Indeed? I have been in the country over two weeks now, and I have not heard any very decided expression of such an idea," said Heathcote.

"But, nevertheless there is—amongst us," continued Mr King with the quiet enunciation of a man who states an incontrovertible proposition, "and we *are* Ireland. Think what it means to have a parcel of plotters at one's elbow." He went on, when the applause had died away. "We are never safe from French intrigue, yesterday it was Thurot, to-day it is Hoche, Bonaparte perhaps, himself, to-morrow."

"I do not think the French will ever make headway here," remarked Mr Poppepper, rubbing an eyebrow, "trust the Popish priests for that, they do not want atheists as rulers."

"Aye, but if it were a question of obeying a Protestant king, or some craw-thumping puppet whom they could control?"

"Remember the tithes," sneered Gash with a smile at the company.

"Oh, but that was a professional question," laughed Neville, "so much out of their own pockets."

"Well, upon my honour it is the one thing I never blamed the Papish priests for resisting," said Mr Blood, setting down his claret. "It's hard to pay for a thing you don't use."

"Devilish hard," commented Mr Gash, with a pointed eye, which brought a quick smile from the rows of self-conscious faces, for Mr Blood never went to church.

"But, pray remember, sir," cried Mr Poppepper, "that

the church is open for them, the minister of the Gospel there to preach."

"And yet one never sees a good congregation in Ireland outside a mass-house," continued Gash, "can it be the sermons?"

"S'life, doctor, you are luckier than a writing parson my father knew in Jamaica, one Wolcot," observed Blood, "none would come to hear him o' Sundays, so he had to shut up shop and go shooting gulls with the clerk."

"A union with England would be a very good thing you think?" remarked a quiet man in spectacles who had not spoken yet. "But what of our trade? Nearly one hundred years ago we killed our woollen industry not to interfere with English commerce—believing they would buy our linen."

"By Jove, Freeman, you are right!" cried Neville, "but they did not, they left it on our hands, so that we might make shrouds of it for our expiring prosperity," and he hummed:—

> "Was she not a fool when she took of our wool
> To leave us so much of the leather, the leather.
> It ne'er entered her pate that a sheepskin well bate
> Would call a whole nation together, together."

"Oh, it need not go waste," exclaimed "Lamby" Gore vivaciously. "We might present it to the Popish women for smocks and stockings, for a more shockingly accoutred set of females than those of the lower orders here I never met in my life."

The ladies laughed.

"We shall take your word for it, sir," rejoined Colonel Lucy gravely, and the laugh died away.

"But trade can't suffer," observed Gash, "or if it does, you will be compensated."

"I—compensated—yes, perhaps," replied the other. "Individually I shall not suffer, my interests are safe, but——"

"Then, give me leave to tell you, sir, that those are the only considerations which should weigh with any man these times," said Mr Gash in a quieter tone than he had employed before.

"The expense of provoking a rebellion and then quelling it will be enormous," said Freeman bluntly.

"Well, we can always make the conquered pay," shouted Blood with his mouth full. "Goad 'em to treasonable action, shoot 'em down after, and charge the survivors for the powder."

"I fear Mr Blood is far too frank for a cabinet minister yet awhile," observed Colonel Lucy suavely, and guessing that some indiscretion had been committed, Miss Prue who had been talking about an approaching ball at Major Cliffe's at New Ross with Mrs Gibbs, gave the signal, and led the ladies from the room.

Servants here entered with lights, the softened splendour of the evening sky was shut out, and Neville now in his glory prepared to spend the night. The gaps occasioned by the retiring ladies were filled by the gentlemen drawing closer together, the air of the company grew more genial, the conversation took a lighter tone, the capacious decanters passing from hand to hand, their cut glass twinkling over the deep glow of the generous liquor within.

Heathcote, constitutionally temperate, would have liked to follow Irene, but this he knew to be impossible, and it was with mixed feelings he saw his host rise amid expectant silence, and propose his health, a function which he was peculiarly fitted to discharge. With reminiscences of his parliamentary manner he expatiated on the ancient friendship which had subsisted between Heathcote's father and himself—the man whom he had selected for the most onerous as well as the most honourable of duties, the guardianship of his only child, when about to make the great change we all must make, and enter the presence of "Almighty God." ("Amicus certus in

re incerta cernitur"), quoted Mr Poppepper. (Hear him! Hear him!" from the company). "He went from this place, gentlemen, almost from under this very roof, grounded in his faith as a Christian man by the sainted predecessor of the gentleman who now fills the incumbency, a youth animated by the most exalted sentiments of patriotism, to offer his service to a king whose benevolence and virtue have justly endeared him to the hearts of his subjects" (cheers). "His sword has flashed in the fabled region of the Orient, and has been unsheathed in the justest and most necessary war his country has ever waged, where he had the honour of saving the life of a Prince of the Blood" (cheers). "And now, gentlemen, he comes to us in what many consider, ahem, the crisis of our fate, to combat the same—er—pernicious principles which are threatening to overthrow the government of Ireland. Gentlemen, I will give you the health of Major Heathcote, the son of my friend, the saviour of his prince, the steadfast champion of his country's honour and his country's fame!"

When Neville had resumed his seat a burst of applause rewarded his peroration, and Heathcote rising, thanked his host in a few straightforward phrases; then he begged to propose the health of his host's charming and dutiful daughter, the Rose of Coolmore—(prompted by Mr Gash) —a suggestion greeted and carried unanimously, Mr Blood seconding it with a proposal that a bumper be drained to every letter in the lady's name.

Meanwhile, the unconscious recipient of those flattering attentions was concealing a yawn behind her fan, and affecting to take an interest in the conversation around her. Mrs Gore began to read for Miss Prue a letter from her daughter Fanny then on her way home from London, in which she dwelt on the delights of Vauxhall, while Mrs Poppepper and a select committee listened sympathetically to the woes of Mrs Freeman, whose husband beat her, the other ladies being engaged at a game of ombre.

Slipping away from her guests on pretence of seeking some music, Irene wrapped herself in a cloak and hastened unseen, to the place of assignation Nancy had mentioned.

The air was balmy with the faint evanescent perfume of hawthorn hedges, and the nearer fragrance of the twin lilacs that twined above the gate connecting the orchard and the rustic flower-garden which flanked one wing, and portion of the rear of the house.

It was not the first time she had come on such an errand, and she could have found her way without the aid of the light yet lingering in the upper heavens. To-night, however, she experienced a sense of apprehension which was not all anxiety for her patriot lover, if lover he was. She had seen little company of late years, and to-night the conversation at the dinner table had strangely interested her. It seemed she had caught glimpses of a wider world and a more exalted field of action. The talk on the affairs of the country appealed to her powerfully, the phrase, "we are Ireland," recurring now with sudden significance, and she felt a thrill of satisfaction in the thought that she too belonged to this privileged class which could control the destinies of a nation. She forgot the squalid meanness of the thought underlying it, and the baseness of the lie it covered.

She recalled proudly the faces gathered about her father's table that evening, and it seemed to her that even in the most fatuous and the most dissipated she had discovered the indefinable expression which Miss Prudence once said makes all well-bred people resemble each other. Where, she asked herself, could a more accomplished gentleman than Colonel Lucy be found, or a more perfect host than her father? She remembered his ease of manner, his graceful welcome for all, his kindliness, his unaffected pleasure in the society of his friends; she recalled too, Heathcote's smile, his resolute though courteous glance, the air of distinction and command which was part of

himself; comparing it suddenly with that of the man she was going to meet, she blushed from brow to chin. She imagined the contemptuous looks, the icy denials which would have greeted anyone who should just then inform her father, or any of his guests, of what she was doing. She, the daughter of an aristocrat, stealing to an assignation as Jenny or Phyllis might have done! Jenny or Phyllis whose shrill laughter was even now echoing from the kitchen where the grooms sat! Who was waiting for her? A peasant-born outlaw, a creature who led the life of a hunted animal. The thought was like a blow. She paused, recollecting vividly her bad breeding in deserting her guests, but the memory of her plighted word sustained her, and she went on, determined that the interview should be short, aye, and should be the last. Pity she still felt but it was no longer the pity akin to love, for shame companioned it.

CHAPTER III

ENGROSSED by these bitter musings, she was unhasping the gate leading out upon the dim, laurel-bordered walk communicating with the encircling road, when she saw an armed, uniformed man stride from the shadow of some evergreens. Instinctively she drew back, thinking it was a belated guest, for there was silver lace gleaming on the blue coat, but with a murmur of welcome, he pulled the gate open, and passing his arm lightly round her waist, kissed her on the lips.

With a gasp she recognised him. It was Devereux, no longer the outcast, but a glowing, glorified Devereux, a sword at his side, epaulets on his shoulders, in his military hat the tricoloured cockade, symbol of victory and fame.

"Fie, Irene," he said releasing her, "a soldier's daughter afraid of a uniform!"

The gentle raillery of the phrase gave him a sudden advantage, Mr Neville having once belonged to a Volunteer regiment, and he kissed her again; this time she freed herself.

"How can you do it?" she said lamely.

"Faith it comes easy," retorted Devereux. "Did you think I meant to wait for parliamentary permission?"

"Oh—to come here like that?" continued Irene.

"What ails the clothes—are they not a good fit?" cried the other, "I got them and my commission when I sailed with Hoche. I have been on fatigue duty for some time past, but now, it is different."

Irene noticed spurs slung on his arm. "Did you jump the wall?" she said. "Where did you leave your horse? There are others in the stable and they may betray you."

"I came on foot," he replied laughing, "but have no fear on that score, I can get the horse when I want one. Slip off that cloak and let me have a look at you!"

Irene obeyed, smiling the preoccupied smile of a woman gratifying at once her lover and her vanity. She had never looked more lovely, her rich beauty set off by the bright fabrics and the antique fashion of her attire, the test of whose simplicity her nobly moulded figure triumphantly bore. He held her from him at arm's-length.

"You grow more beautiful every day," he said, "how proud I should be to lead a measure with you in Paris. Well—perhaps some day!"

The girl laughed. "So the sans-culottes have dancing parties too?" she replied.

"Assuredly. I had the honour of being present at one at the Luxembourg, and they said it was brilliant as any under the old regime. That was the year I returned to Ireland." He sighed, and added quickly, "Do you remember how I met you first at the window of that tavern near the old Friary in New Ross?"

Irene nodded, "Yes," she replied, "at Mr Gilfillan's, he rents some property from my father there."

"Do you recollect how they could not find the block, and I offered the palm of my hand for you to mount by? Ah, how sweet you were—afraid of soiling it! Believe me, that would be the only time it was soiled!"

"Yes—and of falling," laughed Irene, "I never thought that you—that anyone could be so strong."

"And I that so splendid a girl could be so exquisitely light," answered Devereux. "Well, I shall tell a secret, I stole the block that day because I wished to be of some service to you, and if it had been my heart you wanted for a stepping stone, you should have had it!"

He kissed her again, she pushed him away silently, bending her head. He caught her little hands together, and kissed them too, holding them a moment thus and

letting them go again. "It is hard to believe it took place only last March," he continued.

"March, April, May," she said idly, and then she thought of a proverb regarding marriages in that flowery month.

He stood close to her, one hand against a lilac bough his horseman's cloak depending from the arm, so that his face was in shadow.

"Do you recollect the day we met at Adamstown, and I gave you back the glove you dropped at the inn, and how we talked? Ah, how pleasant it was to hear a lady's voice after a year of the life of a dog—But all the while my hand was ready for the pistol. Did you know who I was then?"

"No, but I guessed," she said, lifting her clear eyes to his, "Ah, what stories I do hear about you—poor Mrs Gore—but I do not despair of making you a loyalist yet, sir."

"How amiable of you," he retorted, sinking his voice, "to come here to—to argue me out of treason! Ah, Irene, was it loyalty all the time?"

"I did not know you were an officer," she said discreetly, touching the lace of his coat.

"But nevertheless, I am," he replied, imprisoning the little fingers, "my commission is as good as any held by your friends within. Years before I knew you or the air over you, I left Ireland with I thought a glorious career before me. My father, although here a mere Papist farmer, was out of his own country, the equal of gentlemen of any country in Europe, as the documents he kept blindly poor man, unable to read them, wrapped in cotton wool, testify. Have you never heard of those grants issued by Charles II. to Irishmen who served him or his father, by which they might, if they could, retake possession of their lands, not in the grip of Adventurers or Soldiers? Have you never heard of that huge farce called the Courts of Innocency, one of the jests of the Merry

Monarch? One of my father's brothers went to France where he received a command in the Irish Brigade, thither I was sent, like many others, so that I might be fitted for the same career. It was a peasant here, a gentleman there—you cannot understand. I was duly nominated, and left the Irish College to join, when—the Brigade was disbanded—my uniform only three weeks new! My poor little grief was swallowed in what came after as the cry of the sea-mew is drowned in the thunder-clap, for the Revolution followed. I was arrested and marked for death, but was acquitted. I lived through it all. The things which are to you mere names were to me living realities. Listen, I heard the death-song of the Girondists. I kissed the hand of Madame Roland at the foot of the scaffold; I saw Robespierre with his bandaged jaw go the same road whither he had sent so many. My God, I can hardly believe it all, it is like a dream still, though hardly less wonderful that you should come here to listen to the hunted croppy whose head has a price upon it."

In the shadow of the cloak she blushed, her eyes filled. "Oh, Mr Devereux, why did you not tell me of this before? I never thought that—that we——"

"Were equals," he said softly, "I meant to have told those things once or twice, but your manner made me forget that perhaps I needed justification."

She understood, and blushed again. But, her instincts came to her rescue. She tapped her chin with her fan. "That is a vastly pretty uniform," she said lightly, in exactly the same tone she would have used in addressing any one of the gentlemen she had quitted. It ignored the chaos of terrible things between them. He lifted his shoulders, making the epaulets glisten. I won the right to wear it at Arcola," he replied, "that is the last chapter in my French life. I had the honour soon after of being sent to Paris with despatches, there I met Wolfe Tone."

"Oh, my father knows Mr Tone," cried the girl.

"Then he knows as true an Irishman and as brave a gentleman as ever drew the breath of life," replied the other. "He had just then succeeded in persuading the French Government to fit out an expedition for Ireland, and offered me a share in the undertaking."

He paused and then went on, his voice shaking, "We were over thirteen thousand men, and our fleet forty-three sail, when we left Brest. Disaster dogged us from the outset, we were scattered like chaff, but still in spite of everything we reached the old land, and after a week of calm, found ourselves in Bantry Bay. From that day we had wind enough, but it blew from the east, it was an English wind and it blew as if the hate and fear of England were in every blast. Yet, we remained riding at anchor praying for a change, but none came. I was on board the *Indomptable* with Tone, and if ever man suffered the tortures of hope deferred he did. Think of it, to be for six days within musket-shot of the land we came to save and still held captive by the invisible hand of that accursed wind. Maddened by a report that a detail of men who had landed on Whiddy Island had been stoned by the creatures grubbing there for existence amid its rocks, I volunteered to go ashore and make a reconnaissance. After much delay I received permission, and taking some things needful in a valise, for it was dangerous service, I set off, and after a hard struggle reached the shore. God! how I panted when after long years my feet touched Irish soil again! I found the people, how shall I say it? some cold, some averse, all ignorant, stupidly, bestially ignorant. The priests were against us and the poor wretches paralysed in consequence. Well, I did my best, and even penetrated to Cork, noting everywhere the feverish haste of our enemies' preparation and the supine indolence or the superstitious cowardice of the people! My route was a circuitous one, and it brought me finally to a place called Durrus—that is Irish

for 'door' — and it gave France the door that bitter night! Crossing the mountains, I reached the bay just in time to see the remnant of our fleet beating to sea, the *Indomptable* was last. I watched them through my glass tugging at the cable, and then cutting it—I fell on my knees and prayed for death."

His voice broke, a moment later he laughed. "I returned to Cork again," he resumed in a slower tone, "and at one of our depots in Fishamble Lane, made my report. Thence I was sent by the committee to Wexford where I found my uncle, the priest who had sent me to France, dying. After his death business took me to Dublin, where I was under the command of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and what I saw there made me the unrelenting foe of the power which is strangling our country, aye, and learned something too of the very men whom your father is entertaining to-night. I was marked for arrest, but tried to escape to France, the ports were too well watched, and in a scuffle I killed an officer."

The girl shuddered.

"Pshaw, he was only a marine," laughed the young man, speaking rapidly again, "it was a fair fight and he had a clumsy wrist. They tried to hunt me down, but I had friends and money so I cared nothing for the informers. Thus I have lived since, an outlaw with a price on my head, but I am prouder to-day than if I had won a generalship and the Cross."

"But, it is terrible."

"Yes, I have seen what is not fit for your ears to hear, I have witnessed the tortures inflicted on women as pure and of as delicate a sensibility as your own."

"But—rebellion!" said Irene under her breath.

"Who are the rebels? The very men who are aiding Pitt and Pitt's vile tool, Castlereagh, wore the uniform of the Volunteers, and what they sought we seek now. Is truth falsehood because my Lord Castlereagh betrays what Robert Stewart swore to guard?"

Irene was silent, her companion changed his posture and gently swung the gate to and fro until it creaked a remonstrance. A wavering, flute-like bar of music, reinforced by the tinkling of a piano quivered through the stillness. Irene started, ashamed.

"I must go now!" she exclaimed. "They are waiting."

"I have detained you too long," replied the young man, "but this is my last visit, and it was so pleasant to talk about myself that I forgot I came to say this—forget me; I have done wrong in coming here, but I could hardly help it; I knew I risked my life, and the knowledge gave me in my own eyes a right, but I did not consider you, I fear you must have taken shame for me —coming as I did, a skulking outcast. But, I was not always running, the last time I came I left two yeomen dead at the Pass of the Blackstairs, and the horse found near Mountloftus with the saddle under his belly was the horse which carried me to you. I came in uniform to-night, because I wished you to remember me not as a runaway, but what I am, a soldier. I kissed you this evening for the first time, because only then did I feel worthy to touch your lips."

Irene gave him her hand, she had not calculated on this ending to her brief love affair, she had come to give him his dismissal, and now, he was going of himself—going to stand the desperate chance of war. He asked her to forget, she felt he wished her to remember. Would she? She had wished for this, and yet, was she content?

"Good-bye, God be with you!" he said, gently wrapping the cloak around her. "God keep you, my dear lady," he added as he closed the gate between them.

With a sudden, swift, reckless gesture she turned, put her one hand upon the latch, stretching the other through the bars; he laughed a low, delighted laugh, and his right hand closed firmly upon hers upon the latch and kept it in its place. He caught the other and pressed it to his heart. She pushed her flower-like face through

the rude bars, boldly, with tear-bright eyes, and their lips met.

There was a dull pounding of hoofs upon the dusty road, distinctly audible in the heavenly peace of the May evening; then the sharp faint clink of spur and scabbard shoe. A horse neighed shrilly so close at hand that Irene started. The next moment her hands were widowed, for her lover passed silently into the shadows.

Hastening back, she paused to listen a moment from a window on the stairs at the back. She heard crisp, soldierly voices beyond the laurel-bordered passage leading from the house to the high-road running all round Malplaquet, and thought she recognised those of Devereux. Then, a patter of hoofs streamed by, the noise taking a sharper ring as the rider crossed a little bridge spanning one of the multitudinous brooks in the vicinity, and again all was silent.

"Yeomen," murmured the girl. She wondered how Devereux had evaded them. She was yet to learn from that very window the efficacy of the simple device known as calkins.

When she returned to the drawing-room she found "Lamby" Gore receiving the congratulations of the ladies on a tit-bit from Gluck; he was not very drunk, but Irene felt he would cut a poor figure beside Devereux, a fact for those who affect to despise the philosophy of clothes. A few moments later the other gentlemen flooded the doorway, all talking together and not too distinctly. Neville, who had the reputation of carrying his three bottles handsomely, looked as grave as a judge, and challenged Mrs Poppepper to a game of chess. Irene, delighted that her absence had been apparently unnoticed, devoted herself dutifully to the task of entertaining Heathcote, and found it not distasteful. The soldier still on the sunny side of sobriety, professing much interest in a piece of wool-work which she had just finished. It represented the death of Clorinda, and the subject led naturally to a spirited

description on his part of the light and life and splendour of the East.

Mr Blood, who possessed a really fine voice, was now at the piano accompanying himself, and rendering with much effect Collet's "Surprise Nocturne," but ere he could begin another, a morceau from Dorat, as he was careful to inform the company, Miss Prue, who had affected to converse with Mrs Freeman, motioned Irene imperiously to the instrument.

Possibly owing to the French words of the preceding song she could not remember anything at the moment save a verse or two of Chenier—

> "Comme un dernier rayon, comme un dernier zephyre
> Anime la fin d'un beau jour,
> Au pied d'echaufaud j'essaye encore ma lyre ;
> Peut-être est-ce bientôt mon tour !"

A servant now entered with coffee, and Irene was glad to relinquish the piano to Mrs Poppepper. Mr Gash, Mr Blood, Mr Freeman and Lieutenant Ware sat in a gilded corner under a grinning Indian god which had centuries before heard the scraps of the eternal human comedy—tales of the "Seminary" and the "Pandemonium" which they told one another. Heathcote from motives of delicacy engrossed Irene, oblivious to the fact that she while artlessly answering his questions was striving to follow the thread of a scandalous story concerning Madame Tallien that Colonel Lucy was relating to Mrs Gore's uplifted fan.

Neville, his wig awry, his hands behind his back, moved about the room, pleased because of the cheerful faces around him, now joining in the laughter of the men in the corner, now capping Ogle's anecdotes of the Monks of the Screw and the laughing times when the little brown Jesuit of St Omer's kept the table in a roar, when Dolly Monroe was a toast and Townshend was Viceroy. Anon, he would listen, nodding his

head sagaciously, to the explanations of Mr Poppepper concerning the embarrassing number of Papist ruins in the neighbourhood, and the Protestantism of St Patrick, or stare curiously at "Lamby" Gore as that gentleman held forth on the question of the hour.

"It's the damned Popish rats that are at the bottom of all this mischief," said that warrior, his light-coloured eyes inclining affectionately towards his high nose, as if striving to pierce that barrier. "If we could only combine to exclude all Papist servants from our houses, the lot would soon cease to exist—six months would be the limit."

"Kill 'em off, or what?" cried Neville, startled into attention.

"No—starve 'em," hiccoughed "Lamby," "it's quite a simple project; we could get our servants from England, and then we should have no future trouble with the dogs, save the trouble of burying 'em—which could be done by —hic-con-tract, and would be a labour of love."

"Swift proposed to cut 'em and sell 'em for meat," said Neville.

"And a devilish good idea!" rejoined "Lamby" gravely, "I must tell mother! As for getting 'em to fight —'tis useless. You may pitchcap and flog 'em from morning to night, but they only howl. It is hard work, Mr Neville, but then, it has its compensations—do—do domiciliary visits, you understand? Ha, ha, ha, yes, the girls are pretty enough. Only the other day we found three hidden by their jade of a croppy mother in a hayrick—scooped out like a mouse would a loaf! But, we had 'em out in a jiffey. The Camolins, or the North Cork are not fools—eh, Ware?"

"Hold your tongue!" retorted that gentleman who was laughing over an anecdote of cunning Luke White and his lottery tickets.

"Lamby's" views, however, received confirmation from another part of the room, for the stentorian tones of the former slave-owner of Jamaica were heard above the hum

of conversation, as he said in reply to some observation of Colonel Lucy, "The Irish are no better than Hottentots, sir, you may thrash 'em to your heart's content, but a few soft words make all right again. They have the vices and the excellencies of slaves, good liars, admirable buffoons, adroit thieves, nothing more. I believe that if the impossible happened, and if they had us in their power to-morrow all we need do is give 'em a bellyful of whiskey, and they would be all at each other's throats —they have the memories as well as the hearts of hares."

"Excuse, me, sir," said Colonel Lucy, "I take leave to differ from your sentiments, they are brave; my father who served in the French war heard M. Richelieu pay a high tribute to the valour of the Irish in the field. I am Irish myself."

"Oh, so we all are—most of us!" laughed Blood with the air of a man who admits something he thinks necessary to brazen out with a laugh.

"And furthermore," continued the Colonel, "I heard my father frequently assert that it was the charge of the Irish Brigade which turned the fortune of the day at Fontenoy. He was in the Coldstreams at the time, and had excellent opportunities of judging,"

"It always seemed to me that Fontenoy was a drawn battle, rather than a defeat," said Heathcote, anxious to create a diversion, "it was a mistake to check the British advance in order to receive the Brigade; the French artillery played terribly on us in consequence, whereas a countercharge would have driven the French down-hill. I have heard it said that it was a damned drum beating retreat did it."

"So have I," replied the Colonel, "but my father always held it would have made no difference in the event, for the Irish were disciplined madmen. Though our fire swept rank after rank away, still they came on with the bayonet, quite silently, until they closed, then it was 'Remember

Limerick!' I think—'Egad,' says my father, 'we Coldstreams remembered Fontenoy for many a day!'"

"In whose service were the Irish?" asked the planter, with the smile of a man who does not mean to be put down.

"In the service of Louis XV. of course."

"Aye, exactly — Louis yesterday — Boney to-day — never for themselves."

"It proves they—we, possess courage."

"So do the negroes, sir, and much good it does 'em—only makes their state the more contemptible!"

"Their religion has everything to do with it," said Gash from the card-table where Ware, who was to succeed to a large property, was losing heavily. "They are the most superstitious dogs in existence, they have a perfect talent for grovelling. I for one always thought it foolish to punish their priests, we should have got hold of them; then we could work our will on the rabble."

"Oh, Mr Gash, you surely jest?" cried Mr Poppepper.

"Never more serious in my life," replied the other, taking a trick.

"But how, sir, could the King's government act so?"

"How can it send ships to help the Pope?"

"That is a question of foreign policy, sir, not for me to inquire into," replied the clergyman, "but your suggestion would mean an abandonment of us—a surrender to all that Romanism implies. No, rather convert the people gently, but firmly, from their errors, instead of compromising our beliefs by petting the priests. Far better appeal to their consciences and convictions."

Gash laughed as he shuffled the cards. "Their consciences are in the keeping of the priests already," he said, "and as for their convictions, they are numerous enough under the Timbers Act."

"What matter what they think or what they believe, so long as we keep 'em under, and make 'em support us!" cried Blood, and amid general laughter he hummed "Croppies lie down!"

"Ecod, I won't forget the night at Astley's when the audience smashed the orchestra and mauled the musicians for playing that tune," said Neville, shaking his head. "'Twas a glorious scrimmage."

"Well, we are not like the Kilkenny cowards who stood by and let it be done!" exclaimed Mrs Gore, "Sing it— won't you, Irene, love?"

But Irene affected a deep interest in Heathcote's conversation at that particular moment.

"Here, never mind her!" cried "Lamby," "I know it on the flute, we play it every time we march out, especially when passing the mass-houses."

But in putting the instrument together, the joints jammed, and Mrs Gore, impatient of delay, ran to the piano and with her own white, gemmed fingers struck up the tune, to which Mr Blood sang with much verve, "Lamby" coming in triumphantly at the finale. Then followed in quick succession "The Boyne Water" and the "Protestant Boys," the company applauding each warmly, while a hoarse echo of the party airs came from the kitchen where the men and the waiting-maids were junketing. Neville rubbed his nose reflectively, Irene sat silent with averted face.

"Good God!" thought Heathcote, "and these folk are Irish too!"

Perhaps some vague shadow of such an idea fell upon other minds also, for soon after Mrs Gore declared they must be going else they should meet White-boys on the road, and presently a general movement of departure began. The party broke into little knots, Mr Gash and Mr Blood rallying Heathcote on his monopoly of Irene. The ladies stood together, discussing domestic matters, Neville gravely paced beside Mr Poppepper, as that gentleman checked off the various arguments in favour of his theory regarding the site of the ancient Menapia.

A commotion on the landing when inquired into revealed the fact that "Lamby" had fallen downstairs

in an effort to kiss Phyllis whose virtue had grown to gigantic proportions since Jenny had been acclaimed belle of the kitchen party. Ultimately the gallant soldier was set on his legs, and handed his mother into the carriage, that lady taking charge of his pistols.

Then the guests gradually drifted away, and Heathcote asked permission to be shown to his room, so that the family might be at liberty to retire the sooner. He had experienced too often the vicissitudes of a soldier's life to feel more than a passing emotion on thus revisiting the scenes of his boyhood, but the vapid, reckless talk of the company he had met in the drawing-room had given rise to harassing thoughts which for the moment banished weariness. Essentially a practical man, he saw clearly now that it was not in the interests of such people the Castle had entered upon its policy of deliberate exasperation. "Poor fools," he muttered, pushing up the sash of his window, "if you only knew how much thought Pitt or Castlereagh takes for you, you would not be so ready to insult over your own flesh and blood! So the Papists are negroes, and what are ye, who are content with the rind we throw ye when the orange has been sucked?"

He drew a chair to the casement, and resting his arms on the sill looked out. Below, he could see the shadowy foliage of the elm groves and coppices which lay between him and the misty fields fringing a streamlet whose course he could trace by its murmur; in the distance a lamb bleated softly from the meadows.

In spite of him, old memories, sweet and sad, came thronging back, forgotten faces, forgotten tones, the sacred memories of home; Irene accompanied him, not the stately lady he had parted from a few moments ago, but a little maid with tumbled hair and flushed cheeks who put her hand in his and trotted noiselessly by him, at once a grown man and a boy, through the long series of mental pictures—and they were all the

time going to pick the buttercups nodding their varnished heads in the bawn field, which he remembered lay across the trout stream by the road. They were going rapidly too, he holding her hand and directing the fire of his company on the horsemen of Tippo Sahib, Irene's mother was calling from her gilded frame, and at the same time he heard George the Third saying—"You will now proceed to Ireland, taking the rank of Major in the Ninth Regiment of Dragoons, with ample powers to report on the state of military discipline there, especially in the counties of Carlow, Wicklow, Wexford." "Steady, keep step and touch. So! Halt; form fours. Right turn, quick march. Halt! Deploy—prepare to receive cavalry."

He sat up, his eyes dilated, his face alert. Was he dreaming? He saw only the softly flowing stream shining under the nebulous light of stars. Stay, surely something else was glistening too, something faintly phosphorescent that appeared and disappeared, moving hither and thither in measured time, now a long line, now a hedge of twinkling points? Suddenly, the soldier's practised ear caught the tread of marching feet which even the turf of the bawn field could not deaden. In a moment the meaning was plain, and for one hot instant he dreaded immediate danger, then he shrugged his shoulders, it was simply a body of men being drilled, as they had been, possibly for the past half-hour. Its audacity made him smile, but the smile died away when he reflected on what the audacity implied.

A faint jarring call like the cry of the night-hawk, wavered down the wind, and as suddenly the rhythmical sounds dwindled away into a confused and ever-lessening murmur of departing footsteps, then the interlaced patter of horses' hoofs broke smartly on the succeeding stillness. Heathcote traced it all along the dusty road skirting the grounds of Malplaquet and at a portion of the boundary wall which had been broken by the fall of an unskilfully felled elm, he saw the quick passage of jogging helmets.

"Hah, a patrol!" he muttered, "enough noise to wake the country side—nervous probably."

The horsemen pattered over the little bridge where the irregular road took another turn, and soon the jingling of scabbard and spur died away into a feeble tinkle.

There was a long rift of white on the grey of the brightening sky, the summer dawn was breaking. At the same instant some men who must have been hiding under the bridge appeared upon it; they paused awhile, apparently holding a brief consultation ere they separated. One man carried over his shoulder a pole tipped by a steel head which shone cold in the grey light. For a moment he stood there, a shadowy sinister portent, and shook his clenched fist in the direction of the house. Then, the bridge was empty again, the country lay silent beneath the silent stars.

Thus, Major Heathcote saw for the first time the pike of Ninety-Eight.

CHAPTER IV

HEATHCOTE avoided any mention of the incident next morning, he could not of course doubt the issue of a conflict between the people and the forces of the Crown. "They will be goaded into doing something for which they are not prepared," he murmured, "they will commit some incredible folly, and they will be cut to pieces—I shall probably be one of the slayers." He broke a sigh with an oath, and dismissing the thought, descended to the breakfast parlour at whose door he met Irene.

She was not very tall, but her nobly proportioned figure and the fashion of her cambric gown conveyed an impression of height which owed nothing to mere slimness, while her gracefully poised head gave her presence a stateliness enhanced by her bearing, at once frank and yet indefinably reserved. It was not the type his Dublin acquaintances had taught him to expect, for although *pur sang*, she was not full-blooded. She had just come from the garden, and bore large clusters of white roses veiled in dewy spray.

"We set them on the table, Major Heathcote," she said shyly, "because my mother loved them, and father says they always remind him of her—she was called, as perhaps you have heard—the Rose of Coolmore."

Heathcote bowed. "She did not lead her name or her graces to the grave," he said smiling, "flowers are never amiss, and I fancy that Mr Neville is fortunate in being independent of the seasons in that respect," he added, with a glance at the muslin and its

delicate pink trimming whose tint was reflected in her cheeks.

She made a curtsy. "Your campaigns have taught you to pay compliments to the ladies, sir," she said. "How often have you said the same to the dames of Amsterdam?"

"Not once," replied the soldier truthfully, as he recovered some buds the girl had dropped.

"You surely had the chance?" continued Irene, beginning to arrange her trophies in a tall glass.

"Yes, but not the provocation," answered Heathcote, assisting her with more tactile dexterity than perhaps the occasion warranted.

"I understand—tulips would be a more acceptable simile in those countries," said Irene, bending over the flowers, the perfume from her bodice sweet as the wild thyme of her native hills.

Heathcote smiled. "I think I should prefer the rose of a changeful sky to the most painted beauty of them all," he rejoined. And he kissed her little hand.

"But, how are your sisters called?" he continued as she moved from his side.

Irene repeated the names of the varieties she carried.

"Then you study botany? I fear you are a blue-stocking."

The girl shook her head. "I am most properly ignorant," she replied, "but we had the garden laid out by a pupil of Maw, and I learned a little from him. Aunt Prudence, though she loves flowers, does not love the study."

"Yes," said Miss Prue who had just come in, and was taking her place at the table, "I would as lief see a young maid with scalpel and forceps in her hand as one of those odious botany books. Shall I send you a dish of tea, Major?"

Neville, in no wise the worse for the dissipation over-

night, strolled in with a cheery greeting, and the conversation reverted to the state of the country, though tempered by many references to the Peerage and London life on the part of Miss Prudence who laughed most loyally at anecdotes illustrative of the royal wit. The chatter of Dublin drawing-rooms was retailed, the pedigrees of various steeds discussed, the merits of different breeds of dogs argued over, but once more the talk would drift back to the things of the hour. How long would the present situation last? When would the French descend again? What was the latest plot against the Government —such plots being the only work of the imagination which command a ready sale in Ireland.

"What astonishes me," said Miss Prudence, "is, that with all its exact knowledge of the doings of those people the Government does not take any steps to prevent the business from going further."

"Well," replied Neville, "they put the ring-leaders in prison—everyone is a ring-leader it seems. There's Mr Harvey of Bargy Castle, a queer fish to be sure, but an honest gentleman, and our friend; Fitzgerald of New Park—Ecod for aught I know, myself to-morrow. The gaols are full, and the ships will soon be, if they continue pressing the Navy into the service, sure Marcus O'Daly, my own cousin, was arrested by an idiot called Plornish, at the Hermitage and clapped on board a frigate bound for New Guinea, by the Lord! But, we'll make that a sore business—we have good friends—that Gash you met yesterday, Ralph, is a mighty sharp fellow."

"Well, I vow and protest," cried Miss Prudence, lifting her hands, "that there is only one way to pacify Ireland, and that is to bundle the whole population, neck and crop, out of the country. I wish we were safe away from it in London at my old lodgings, as we ought to be now, near Kew Gardens, where one could see the prince and princesses walking about, and maybe meet the King himself."

Heathcote glad of the opportunity, plunged at once into a description of the pleasures of the metropolis, retailing every now and then anecdotes of court intrigue, or royal kindliness, Neville obliging him to give a brief account of the campaign in Holland, and his own share in the rescue of Prince Adolphus from some of the enemy's horse.

After breakfast the gentlemen strolled out to the almost empty stables where Heathcote inspected the foundered mare, and suggested a mode of treatment which raised him several degrees in the estimation of Mat. Irene's bay, the only other steed in the establishment, was pronounced in danger of getting too fat and contracting heart disease.

"She does not take as much exercise as she used," said Neville, "she has had no companion since Fanny Gore went to London, and besides, the country is so troubled, I don't like to let her go—I don't mean the people, but on account of those damned yeomen. Here, Mat, bring out the Major's horse, and let us have a look at her. What's the name?"

"Lightfoot."

"Ecod, she's like it."

The gallant steed with a whinny of pleasure at the sound of her master's voice was now led out, arching her glossy neck in the sunlight. Neville stood by, patting here, feeling there, ever and anon drawing back to admire while he went into details of other steeds and discussed their merits.

"Egad, I daresay you would refuse a good round sum for her now?" he said, standing back, his hands in his pockets, his head on one side.

Heathcote smiled. "I would not do so," he replied, "the King presented me with her."

"Oho, she has seen service?"

"No: she was in stables at Windsor when I returned to England, but I broke her to pistol-firing, and the

line of blazing straw, she is a little fresh,' but answers readily to hand or heel."

Miss Phaire who was at one of the windows, now called Irene to see the beautiful present the King had given Major Heathcote, regretting that the Gores were not there to hear. Irene obeyed, and the steed was led underneath, both ladies being loud in its praises.

"I have examined your horse," said the soldier, when the encomiums ceased, "and she looks as if she would be the better for a canter. If I remember rightly, there ought to be some good roads in the neighbourhood."

"Yes," replied Irene, "out by Adamstown."

"Why don't you go and show him?" asked Neville with a wink, "sure Mat told me just now the belly-band of the saddle is all right. Anyway, come down to us, asthore, or we shall have a crick in our necks, looking up at you, like the Beauty in the Tower."

And beautiful she did look just then Heathcote thought, her warm carnations contrasting with Miss Prue's mellowed charms, her light robes standing out against the softened shadows of the room behind. With a girlish laugh she left the window, and after a not unreasonable interval, appeared, clothed in an olive-hued riding habit, richly trimmed with silver lace, a grey ostrich feather curving over the brim of her low-crowned hat, whose band bore a silver buckle.

Heathcote stepped into the house, changed his sober coat for his uniform, and emerged almost at the same instant, a gallant figure, the gold-laced scarlet making a vivid spot of colour in the yard as he strode towards Irene, his jingling spurs and sparkling sword-hilt flashing in the sunlight.

Irene glanced shyly at him, and the soldier felt a thrill of child-like joy at having attracted her admiration; he could not know that she was mentally comparing the different effects of silver and blue, and gold and

crimson. She decided that the former looked better by starlight.

"Egad, you are a fine pair," said Neville, "you might pass for brother and sister any day, and sure ye are—in a manner. Don't ye remember the day ye went fishing in the trout stream, and she fell in and you pulled her out, and brought her in dripping. Lord, how her mother fell a clapping and a kissing of her in the hall! Dear, dear, he added, brushing his hand before his eyes, "how time flies! How many years between?"

"More than I care to think of," said Heathcote with a sad smile.

"Nonsense, why you are not thirty-five yet, that's young for a major, or any man. But, hark ye, Ralph, I have not seen you salute your old playmate—Have the girls of Dublin spoiled you?"

Irene blushed and glanced at Miss Prue who was an authority on such matters.

"Fie, brother," cried that lady, desisting from her occupation of patting Lightfoot's muzzle, "kissing is going out of fashion, is it not, Major Heathcote? There was vast deal of bussing in my young days. In particular I recollect a gentleman who often came to our house—with others, and he never lost an opportunity of taking the privilege with—me." And the blush on the old maid's cheek was quite as vivid as that upon Irene's. "But," she continued, tossing her head, "he used such a quantity of snuff, that I fear it set me against the practice."

"Fie, sister," retorted Neville, with tender mimicry, "kissing will never go out of fashion so long as there are pretty maids and brisk fellows about. I am sure the major does not turn his back upon old customs any more than old friends. Come, Irene!"

The girl lifted her conscious cheek, a dimple eddying under the blush. Heathcote raised his hat. As their heads were together Neville noticed the narrowing

Then Heathcote swung the girl into her saddle his own, and waving a laughing farewell to th the yard, cantered down the noble avenue, Sh setter, bounding in their wake.

Neville stood looking after the retreati dappled by sun and shadow, until they turned of the gates, and then with a little sigh, retrace to the house. As he did so an apologetic c the kitchen door attracted his attention, he con brows impatiently. "Well, what now?" he sai

A small, weasened man shambled forward, over the threshold. "I want a wurrd with y he cried, pulling off his straw hat, and moppi face.

Neville recognised him as a small farmer in bourhood, but so pinched and drawn by terr poor wretch's face, that it is possible he did him at first. A human pity at the sight of the eyes and twitching mouth touched him. "W said more gently.

"I have it here, sir," said the man, noddin towards the kitchen. "I stole it when he w brought it across to yer haner."

"Have what, Desmond? What's the m ye?"

"The pike!" The word was whispered tr "Sure I was shaking every minnit I was through the fields now. The yeos kem to Ke last night, next door to the Lonergans. Kell

childer runnin' like lunatics over the fields, an' in the mornin' the place was like 'twould be if you killed a pig in it! The son had this, an' I kep him from goin' out when he heard the yeos at Bridgie Lonergan, that's the girl he do be sweet on, an' I was shiverin' meself for fear they'd break into our house, on account of the sisters. Sure yer haner will give me a bit of a screed to say I surrendered my weepon."

"Oh, aye, come here, Mat, carry that pike you'll find in the kitchen hall to the stable, and put it in the fodder rack. Sure, I thought you were too sensible a man for this kind of work?" continued Neville, as Mat disappeared bearing a long pole swathed in straw.

"It wasn't me, yer haner, but the son," whimpered the man; "the yeos kem to the house one night, an' med a bit free with the sisters, an' he swore he'd have a steel welcome for 'em the next time. He's very passionate!"

"Hah!" cried Neville, then he checked himself, and drawing out a note-book, scribbled a few lines on one of the pages hastily torn off. "There," he said, giving it to the cringing man, "show them that the next time they come."

The other broke into pitiful expressions of gratitude. "But is it for all of us?" he cried. "I mane the women?"

"Yes, the women—hens, ducks an' all, down to the sow," laughed Neville with what would have been brutality in another man; "they won't want to kiss her, sure!"

This witticism drew from the unfortunate wretch a cackle of laughter more terrible than sobs, and dimly aware of its pathos, Neville hurried away with a careless word of encouragement.

When he returned to the breakfast room he found Miss Prudence lecturing Phyllis on neglect of duty, while the handmaiden stood in an attitude expressive of repentance, the corner of a duster in her mouth.

With an easy-going man's dislike for scenes, which in this case he knew would end in an attack on or an appeal to himself, he wheeled round and whistling to Shot who had found the pace of the horses too trying, strolled out into the garden where he wandered from plot to plot with the preoccupied frown of one seeking distraction rather than amusement, for the train of thought aroused by his daughter's blushing acceptance of Heathcote's kiss threatened a branching off into most undesirable reflections. "Ecod," he murmured, kicking a pebble over one of Miss Prue's carefully weeded borders, "a couple of thousand would set me on the pig's back again, and I'd raise it to-morrow but for that cursed mortgage!" Here Jenny passed him bearing a basketful of clothes, exquisitely white, destined to dry on the lavender hedges and square of lawn where the apple trees kept here and there a blossom between their tender leaves, and he stopped her, to exchange a few kindly words.

To Jenny, Walter Neville, J.P., Member of Parliament, lord of Malplaquet House and domain, was set apart on a pinnacle of almost inaccessible grandeur, but, to Walter Neville, one of the most ill-used men in Christendom. And as he now stood idly watching Jenny shake out her snowy burdens he was filled with an overpowering passion of pity for himself.

He sauntered on again, listening to the rhythmical sweep of Jerry's scythe on an unshaven portion of the lawn, and reviewing his past life, discovered nothing in its sixty odd years to palliate or bewail. He came into a fortune when he was of age, and spent it. As often happens to such men, he had no sooner lost one than he fell into another by the unexpected death of a relative. That had followed the first across continental gaming tables and Irish turf. But, yet again, when he succeeded in carrying off the reigning toast of the season, now alas some years dead, he came into a third; this he had gone the best possible way about spending too, for lavish enter-

tainments at home, and ostentatious display abroad were not then any more conducive to making one's income exceed one's expenditure than they are now.

Of late he had honestly endeavoured to cut down expenses, pay his more pressing creditors, and live economically—as he understood the word, but old habits are not easily dethroned, and his parliamentary duties in Dublin at certain times of the year compelled him to renew them. Moreover, some of his schemes for working his estate had proved nearly as ruinous as his extravagance. His embarrassed circumstances had obliged him to refuse an advantageous offer for Irene's hand a fortnight before, from the family of young Ware, and the reflection that his own mismanagement had materially interfered with his daughter's welfare was a source of the keenest form of self-reproach his sanguine nature was capable of experiencing.

"By Jove, I'd sell the place in the morning if I got a good purchaser," he said aloud, "only Smithers & Sneep, the lawyers, would get the lion's share—'twould be from the frying pan into the fire. I'll have to resign my seat too, though that's not much good for king or country in this crack-brained time—ah, Gash, how d'ye do?"

He had suddenly caught sight of Mr Gash who was riding leisurely down the road that was visible from the garden. The diversion promised to be a welcome one, and abandoning the idea of talking to Jerry about grass-cutting, he approached the low wall with its fringe of sloping laurel which separated it from the highway. Mr Gash reined up, asked about Irene and Miss Phaire, who had, he trusted, recovered from the fatigues of the preceding evening. Neville's answer was diffuse, and he added with almost a wink, that Irene and the major had gone off for a canter. Mr Gash put the handle of his whip to his chin, cocked his head to one side, and laughed a laugh echoed by the father.

"So soon!" he said, "and the little rogue excused

herself from going with me last Wednesday, when Bookey was here."

"Oh, egad the major is first favourite, I can tell you," rejoined Neville.

Mr Gash tossed an airy sigh to the summer zephyrs, switched his riding boot, and then asked, "Have you heard the news? They are drilling at last!"

"Here?" asked Neville in a weak voice.

"Aye, in Rourk's field."

Neville moved nearer the hedge, his features sharpened with anxiety. He broke off a leaf and bit its bitter green in two. If Gash were right, the country was disturbed, and Malplaquet House a drug in the market.

"When was it?" he asked at length, with feigned indifference.

"Only last night; I had the information from—one of my tenants."

"But, how is this, the United Irishmen have made no headway here, as far as I know?"

Mr Gash shook his head waggishly. "The North Cork did it," he said, "I knew they would from the way they went to work. Confess now that Castlereagh is not the reckless fool you took him for!"

"Are you going anywhere in particular?" said Neville. "If not, ride round, and let me know more about it."

Mr Gash signified his willingness, and soon both men were pacing up and down before the rustic porch of the door giving on the garden.

"Your news troubles me in more ways than one, Gash," said Neville, "I am devilish sorry the people are roused, for, egad I've been thinking seriously of selling the place."

Mr Gash's face, it was a pale, tense, alert face, showed a sudden, perhaps ungovernable gleam of surprise. He was aware that Neville's affairs were not on the surest footing, but had not suspected such a development at this stage.

"Not on my own account," continued the latter, "but on Irene's. The girl must be considered, poor thing, the least she deserves is a decent dower out of her mother's property."

The scheming brain at his side was weighing probabilities, but its owner gave no sign.

"It's a pleasant place too," Neville went on, looking slowly round. "If the road didn't come so close here just, and those plantations by the gate and the river were a little more grown, and the wall built up a bit where those elms knocked it down, why 'twould be as pretty a place as a man could wish to finish off in. If I had only myself to think of, I wouldn't mind, I could pay off the mortgage, and clear the debt away—in time, but, where would Irene be then? An old woman, perhaps, with, God help us, a broken heart."

He brushed a tear from his eye with his coat sleeve, and Mr Gash made up his mind. "You have honoured me with your confidence, my dear sir," he said, laying his hand on the other's arm impressively, "but, what might the liabilities be, if I am not too inquisitive?"

"By no means," replied Neville heartily, "it may be public property soon. The estate is dipped to the extent of some nine—let's say ten thousand pounds—I am not quite sure—that's taking one thing with another."

"And you were thinking of selling your place for *that*?" said Gash musingly. "You intend selling the bit of ground in New Ross too, I daresay?"

"Oh, ecod, I nearly forgot—yes, everything," answered Neville. "That same New Ross property never brought me much."

Mr Gash began to laugh silently, Neville looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"If I were a rich man, Mr Neville," he said, recovering himself and speaking crisply, "I would give you a cheque for the amount before noon to-day!"

Neville regarded him grimly.

"I am not joking," the other went on, "I had it in my mind to speak about that land last night, but could get no opportunity—I suppose your claret was too good. Well, I was in Dublin on Monday last about Mr Daly's business, and other matters——"

"I am eternally obliged——"

"Now—now! S'life, I am sorry I mentioned it—and I had an interview with Lord Castlereagh. What did I find him doing, sir? Why, studying a map of New Ross. Being from the place, so to speak, he questioned me concerning owners of property by the water-side, and I gave him what information I could. One point was marked by two parallel lines, near the Friary Gardens I think. 'Do you know, Phil,' says he, 'who owns that?' 'I can only think of one of property there, my lord,' says I, 'Mr Neville of Malplaquet.' 'That's the member for Coolmore?' he says like a flash, 'I know him well, but he has not much faith in me, if I am to judge from his speeches in the House.' I said nothing. 'Egad he's a lucky man,' he says, 'in spite of himself, for if I get my way in the matter I have in hand, we'll have a fine dock built there, and that strip of land will be worth the rest of his property put together!'"

Both men were silent for a few minutes, Mr Gash plucked a carnation.

"Why does he not speak out then," said Neville at last, "if he wants to build docks and improve the country?"

Mr Gash was absorbed in the carnation.

"He is a very clever person—I never doubted it—so is the devil. He is probably in earnest, but I cannot understand his going back on what he said and professed in '93. He said then he would pledge himself to parliamentary reform, he has not carried out that pledge. He does not want to reform, he wants to destroy."

"Yes—to build upon a surer foundation."

"By robbing the country of her autonomy?"

"By preserving her integrity."

"How?"

Mr Gash drew himself up with gentle dignity. "We look at this matter from different standpoints," he said, "it is useless to argue. I hope you think me an honest man, Neville, I know I would thrust this hand into the fire before setting it to anything dishonourable. I have accepted his lordship's policy, and devoted whatever talent I possess to forwarding it with voice and pen. He knows better than any man the aims and object of the class calling themselves 'United Irishmen,' and knowing these aims, he would neither be a Christian nor a faithful subject to his king if he did not brave everything to crush them."

"Even civil war?"

"Even civil war!" repeated Mr Gash dauntlessly, tossing the flower away. Neville stared helplessly at him. "Who rules the country?" continued Gash in his low, concentrated tones. "The midnight assassin or the Minister of the King? What would he do? Restore in place of simulacra, realities; instead of a palsied power, living authority."

Neville was still silent.

"I tell you," Gash went on, "he deplores more than you the necessities which urge him to force our deluded countrymen to abandon the criminal designs the agents of France are directing against us. You see the result already—those pikes you burnt the other day in the yard. He is but the surgeon who applies the knife to save the patient."

Mr Gash removed his hat, and passed his hand lightly over his forehead. "Egad," he said, "I am talking too much I fear, you are good to bear with me. But, what was it? Oh, yes, your property at New Ross. Well, his lordship said too that if you had any idea of parting with the place he would be glad to purchase it for himself. He did not hint that I should speak to you, or

anything of that kind—he's the essence of honour—but, he said that any time you wanted to get rid of it, I might make an offer in his behalf. 'For, Gash,' says he, 'I suppose he'd as lief deal with the Devil as with me!' However, when I heard you talking of selling out, I could not allow you to take such a step without letting you know its possible value."

"Its possible value?" said Neville.

"Oh, if you doubt our sincerity, of course I have nothing more to say. But, test us, if you care, name any sum you like."

"If I said ten thousand?" said Neville with a nervous laugh which might have meant that he was sensible of the absurdity of dallying with an impracticable idea, but chose to humour his companion.

Mr Gash pulled a long face. "Well," he said after a moment's pause, "I do not say that we would not accept it on those terms, but everything would depend on contingencies which you appear determined to avert."

"I would avert nothing which would be for the good of the country."

"And do you think it is for the good of the country that a parcel of idle squires should assemble in a stone house in Dublin, to chatter about God knows what—their mistresses, their horses, their dogs, and play at controlling the destinies of the nation?"

Mr Gash felt for a moment he had gone too far as Neville said with an accent of displeasure, "Oh, come, Gash, you ought to know it is not so bad as that. There are many men in the Irish Parliament who could tell you how false an idea yours is. For my part, one of the reasons which has induced me to think of selling and going up to Dublin was to try and if possible find a way out of the present *impasse*. If only united, instantaneous action were taken, the minister could be forced to declare his views openly, it is intolerable that half a country should be kept in commotion, with the French at our

very doors, by disaffection which in England or Scotland would be crushed in a fortnight."

"Your principles do equal honour to your head and heart," said Gash humbly, "but if I might as a friend advise you, I should say, 'stay at home.' I have some information that the present state of things will go on no longer—and in any case it is too late to hope for anything by parliamentary action now—we must wait."

"Aye, wait, but what will our waiting avail if the rebels win?"

Mr Gash laughed heartily. "Win!" he echoed.

"Yes," said Neville, "they are brave, that's Lucy's opinion."

"You forget that they are Catholics too."

"What has that to do with it?"

"A good deal. But, let us suppose they did win—fellows of the type you have around you—ignorant, superstitious hounds. Suppose they rule the country. Who will be their officers?—Priests. Their law-makers, guides, advisers, what-not?—Priests. What will the English Government do? Buy over my lords the Bishops, their masters again, with any tinsel rubbish they fancy. But, where would *we* be then? Dead—if you like damned, and the English Government would be going on its way without us!"

He paused, his strenuous face lit up, then he laughed. "Egad," he cried, "I cannot tell what ails me, I am strangely excited to-day. There is no fear those dogs will beat the King's troops in the long-run—the country is not with them, whatever they may say. Look at the affair of Blaris Moor some years ago, if they meant business then they would have risen. The army is on our side by this. Ha, ha, I encountered a detachment of Bookey's new recruits the other day, the Camolins, about this place, and a more cut-throat, disorderly gang I never laid eyes on, but quite good enough to goad rebellion to the surface. By the way, that reminds me,

your friend the major is on a tour of inspection is he not? How highly they must think of him in London—Gad, it's better than running from pillar to post in the Low Countries."

"Yes, the War Office thinks well of him, so he was sent here to report upon the state of the army, and when we found he was at Enniscorthy, we of course could not let him go without a visit."

Mr Gash tapped his teeth with his silver-mounted riding whip. "By jove," he said, "what sights he must have seen, and what a vast deal of unnecessary trouble he takes."

There was stiffening in Neville's upper lip, and he stood erect. "He is an honest man, sir," he said, "he tries to do his duty as he sees it."

"No doubt," rejoined Gash, dreamily, "but what a waste of time it is, writing reports and laying complaints which will never see the light, when he might be courting the girls, or card-playing."

"Gash, you don't mean——"

"I mean," said Mr Gash decisively, "that he is losing his time. Not one of those documents which he is I hear fond of sending off to London will ever meet the King's eye. Do you think they are mad over here? He is a martinet with a martinet's ideas—everything must be done by rule, as if anything in Ireland ever was or ever will be!"

"Perhaps," replied Neville, "he is a little too humane."

"He has as much humanity," said Mr Gash, making his ring sparkle, "in his composition, as I have in that little finger! Why, it was only last week he had a poor wretch beaten almost to death in Carlow for stealing some money from a comrade. A few days before, he came upon yeomen across at St John's or Dephney, I forget which, hanging a woman from the poles of a cart to get information out of her. Well, up my bold

major stalks and threatens 'em with pains and penalties if they did not show their authority. There were five or six of them and a sergeant, for they always go in bodies for—he—he—protection, and they would have given him a bullet as an answer, but one of 'em who had seen him at Enniscorthy guessed he was of consequence, tipped the others the wink. So they showed him a kind of general order to arrest and question; the woman, poor wretch, whining and blessing him all the while as well as her wind-pipe would allow. Well, sir, when he finds all ship-shape he stands aside and they string her up again, Heathcote with his hands in his pockets watching 'em. They tried their best, being on their metal, but she wouldn't speak. 'You are a pack of damned bunglers,' says he, 'did you ever try this?' And he showed a trick he said he had learned in India, which kept her yelling until she fainted. Then, one of 'em in a temper, blew out her brains, and Heathcote knocked him down for taking the life of one of His Majesty's lieges without warrant. The upshot of it was, he reported the lot. That's the major, he would carry havoc through this or any other country, but there should be the regulation number of buttons on every man's gaiters, or he would know why."

Neville knitted his brows, and looked helplessly up at the apple leaves gleaming in the sunlight and the row of Irene's doves preening their wings on the orchard wall. The uselessness of his position was coming home to him, and mayhap, the futility of his life. It seemed that all was slipping headlong to ruin, that all the world shrieked in his ear, "*Sauve qui peut!*" What in the name of God, in the name of common sense, was there worth struggling for in this miserable land?

He looked round, Mr Gash was playing with Shot, endeavouring in vain to persuade that intelligent animal to give the paw. Shot had feigned unconsciousness, then abstraction, then misapprehension, and had finally gone

over on her back, both forepaws doubled up against her breast, as a definite protest against further annoyance.

"Gash," said Neville, quietly, "Castlereagh must be a great man or a great rascal?"

"Perhaps," replied Mr Gash, without looking up, "he is a little of both . . . the generality of us are."

"Ecod, you may be right," observed Neville, "the thing is not unusual. But, you spoke as if you believed in him?"

"And so I do," answered Mr Gash, meeting his troubled eye. "He is the only man who knows his own mind. You cannot thwart, you may trouble him. He splits his intentions into a thousand invisible strands and when he has compassed his object, gathers them up again. Believe me, it is good to be the friend of such a man."

"Yes, if one had only to think of one's self."

"And what else is worth a thought now?" demanded the other. "We wanted free trade or—some years ago, when we were all volunteers. Well, we have free trade, but where are the volunteers? You know how their fuss and fury melted like snow in the flatteries of Portland. We have a country that is a disgrace to the universe and a parliament past reform. Behold its acts and judge it! Look at its supine indifference, its interminable debates, its hare-brained legislation. Five years ago it permitted the rabble of the Catholics to the franchise, but sternly forbade our Catholic equals a seat in the House! From first to last it is a blunder, is it not time that it should come to an end? For my part, I would hail with delight any prospect which would reduce the present chaos to order. Castlereagh is the one man who can do this. You may dislike his policy, but look at his daring, his energy, his resource. Who but a great statesman could find time to inquire personally into the plans he has caused to be made for the dock I spoke of?"

"Ah, yes," cried Neville, taking up the word, "that is a good idea, I was thinking of introducing a bill for something of the kind, but it was at the other side."

"Exactly," replied Gash with unaltered front, "it is just the thought which would present itself to any man who had the welfare of the country at heart, though he did happen to believe that she would be better linked to that sister whom God and Nature have given her, than tossed on the bosom of the ocean, a prey to the first spoiler who comes!"

"Gash," said Neville with one of those flashes of shrewdness which sometimes illume such characters, "you write too many pamphlets. Why do you not go into the House and say all this?"

Mr Gash laughed, the idea was not displeasing. "It is not too late," he said, "Burke was thirty-six before he began parliamentary life."

They paced up and down in the sunlight, each occupied by the same thought, while Phyllis who had got over her temporary state of mortification, could be heard crooning from a window.

"Tell me," said Neville stopping abruptly and facing the other, his hands behind his back, "what would you do in my place, suspecting and disliking this man as you know I do, but finding yourself powerless in the present juncture of affairs?"

"The old fox," thought Gash, his candid eye meeting Neville's puzzled glance, "how he winds!" Aloud he said, "In your place I should think of myself first. I would save my credit by washing my hands out of politics altogether. I should apply for the Escheatorship of Munster, but I should take care to let Lord Castlereagh know that while distrustful of his policy, I was prepared to give that policy a trial on general principles."

"Would not that look like playing into his hands?" asked Neville naïvely.

Mr Gash admitted it might take such a complexion to the jaundiced eye of envy, but what of that—"Mens sibi conscia recti!"

"Besides, it might look like reneaguing on my principles?" continued the other anxiously.

Mr Gash entered an energetic disclaimer.

"Well, but I do not want to have any communication with the man."

Mr Gash thought a straightforward letter could do no harm, there was no use in conferring a favour if people did not know to whom to be grateful; besides, it might lead to some discussion about the projected docks, and Mr Neville's local knowledge might prove valuable.

The old clock set in the porch by one of Mrs Neville's ancestors, struck the hour.

"Egad, Gash," said Neville, "you don't put a tooth in it anyway, in for a penny in for a pound. A man might do worse. I thought too I was bound to hold my ground, now it seems everything is going by the board."

"So it is," replied Gash, "the first rumble of the earthquake is in our ears. There was fighting yesterday at Carlow."

"And the rats desert the sinking ship," continued the other with a distinctness of thought and a confusion of metaphor which gave his companion food for reflection. "However, there is time enough to talk of those things; come in and have a glass of Madeira, the day is hot and the sun is getting the better of our leafy screen. Tell me about this fighting."

"Oh, a mere brush I understand," replied Gash, "the Dublin mail was stopped at Naas, and the Limerick one at Kildare, Swayne's men at Prosperous will soon settle that nonsense."

Both gentlemen now entered the house where they were met by Miss Prue, and the visitor related at length his budget of news concerning an attack which had been made upon the town of Carlow by a large number of

rebels who were beaten off with great slaughter. Those good tidings taken with the Madeira, induced a most optimistic view of the "present discontents," and after a pleasant hour Mr Gash rode away smiling to himself, for he felt he had done a good day's work.

CHAPTER V

As Heathcote cantered down the avenue he was aware of a sense of unwonted exhilaration, a lightening of the heart such as he had not felt for many years. It seemed to him that the Door of Youth had been opened once more, that he was going back to an earlier time which was springtime too. Irene's beauty appealed in a new phase as she dashed along beside him, an incarnation of the buoyancy of the morning. Issuing from the gate of iron-work towering upward to its crest-crowned apex, they wheeled to the left, and rode out gaily between the blossoming hedges of white-thorn.

"Shall we keep to the river, or go straight on?" said the girl.

"Straight on is in the direction of a place called the Hermitage?"

"Yes: how well you remember! But a yeoman garrison is there I think."

Heathcote laughed. "Very well, we shall stay by the river, and leave the Hermitage for another time," he replied. "Gad, what a strange old put that Anthony Luttrell was who owned it last. I recollect often meeting him on the road, when a boy, muttering and musing under the beeches. 'Twas quite derelict before he got it, the house-keeper told me mass-priests and rogues of the sort harboured there. By the way, Mr Gash whom I met yesterday, owns it now."

"Yes," answered the girl, "but I believe he came to some arrangement with the Government concerning its use for a garrison. I wish sincerely he had not done so."

"He seems a sharp blade, is he from this place?"

"I cannot tell, he is a distant relative of the Luttrells I believe; he came to live here only a few years ago, he is often away."

"No wonder," laughed the soldier, "it is not a cheerful spot. Anthony Luttrell's housekeeper—her sister was employed at Malplaquet at the time too—showed me over it in the old boy's absence. 'Twas all passages, half rookery, half rabbit burrow. What a glorious morning!"

Glorious it was; the breeze that tossed their horses' manes and set their pulses dancing, came eastward over the cool river water deep in its noble woods or spreading pastures sweet with the scents of early summer. As they trotted forward Irene pointed out many a land-mark recalled by her companion, or related some laughter-moving episode of the past so vivid to him, so dim to her, the beautiful face aglow, the ripple and flash of her native stream repeated in voice and glance.

They had long lost sight of Malplaquet, and were skirting the base of a wood-crowned hill when they met Nancy hobbling along, the bag of simples on her back. Her face reminded Irene of Devereux, and for a moment her spirits were clouded. Heathcote tossed the woman a piece of money in acknowledgment of her reverential curtsy, and carelessly related his rencontre of the preceding evening, the girl's cheek taking a deeper tinge as he described the outlaw's appearance. She rallied him nervously on having forgotten old Nancy.

"So that is 'Mrs Luttrell's' sister!" he said, turning to look after the nodding figure, "Good God, how ye alter! And once she was a sonsie body with a tricksy eye. Her loyalty is not too robust," he continued, "for egad I think she was waiting to talk to the fellow I spoke of. At first I believed he meant to try a pistol shot at me, but it seems he was only anxious to escape observation, so I let him go, there are plenty of yeomen to do

this catch-pole work—all half of them are fit for. What a run!"

Irene, whose vanity had been stabbed by each careless phrase, caught eagerly at the suggestion with a merry laugh, and challenged her cavalier to a race, naming a distant clump of trees which stood out vidette-like from a larger group as the goal. At the word they set off, the light summer dust rising in little puffs from beneath their horses' feet, Lightfoot straining against the bit, the brown mare, "Aileen" with loose rein and plunging gallop.

At first Heathcote allowed the girl to gain several strides, and then, when half way, gave Lightfoot her head, but to his surprise she did not answer quite so readily as he had expected, and though she gained upon the bay, it was with a manifest effort. Just as her head was showing alongside Irene's saddle, the girl's hat blew off in a most natural manner, and the finish was postponed in order to recover the head-gear, which Heathcote did without dismounting; a feat of horsemanship she declared to be "vastly pretty."

A halt was now called, so that the hat might be re-adjusted, and presently the race was forgotten in the new train of thought suggested by Heathcote's agility. The soldier, pleased at her praise, drew largely on his Eastern experiences as they walked along side by side. He described the Sikh horsemen stealing down upon their foe in the grey of the morning, man and steed one living piece of intelligent mechanism, as the swift springy trot merged into the gallop which ended in a whirlwind of flashing blades that never fell in vain. He spoke of the manly pastimes of the camp, the soldierly feats with horse and sword that teach hand and eye the alertness and unerring promptitude so necessary in the trade of killing.

As he caracoled beside her, now on this side now on that, illustrating by gesture his descriptions, she felt the stern beauty of man and charger, her practised eye taking in every detail of menage; rider and steed sank or rose as

if by one impulse, never at rest save when Lightfoot reared straight aloft, her forefeet in air, Heathcote's fiery eyes lit by subdued excitement glaring down from behind the silky mane. Irene uttered a little scream, half fear, half pleasure, and the bay mare swerved; in a moment the soldier was at her head soothing Aileen's quivering nerves, jarred by what she evidently considered a most unequine display on the part of her companion.

"What a beautiful sword, Ralph!" cried the girl; they were Ralph and Irene now; "what fine carving on the hilt! Foreign, is it not?"

"Yes," replied the soldier with a grim smile, as he unsheathed the blade, "I had it from an Indian Rajah; there were jewels on the guard once, but all are gone, some in actual service, some across a money-lender's counter. They were worthy of the sword, that is saying much."

It was in truth as lovely a weapon as ever leaped to the light of day; the handle exquisitely chased with intricate designs in filagree, the cross to which a shell had been added with questionable taste but excellent reason, a miracle of workmanship, the blade itself one line of inlaid steel, blue as the wintry night skies o'er the snow-capped mountains where it was forged, dazzling white on edge and point as the ice-fed torrents which tempered it, red with Deccan gold as the blood it drank in many a foray since the day when hilt was wedded to it first. With timid laugh but firm hand, the young girl took the sword and shook it aloft, watching the sunlight riot on its blade, a dainty figure against the great wood behind, the pose appealed to Heathcote's instincts.

"'Slife, Irene," he said, "if you had but a breast-plate and helmet you might pass for Clorinda herself!"

A shade of sadness touched her brow. "Poor Clorinda," she said as she returned the weapon, "her fate was pitiful, though she was happy in it, seeing her death came from a hand she loved, but Tasso should

have spared her to die fighting by her lover's side and shielding his life with her own."

When they turned their horses' heads homeward the sun was already high, and they were glad to seek shady bridle-paths, catching at every point new views of wood or dale or water, but so far as any sign of life went, they might have been in the heart of some Virginian forest. Cottages they passed indeed, but no smoke curled from the chimneys, no children played before the doors.

However, as they neared a village, long since rotted away owing to the failure of the spasmodic industry—quarrying—which had given it birth, the sinister shadow lying upon all that lovely land touched them, for, at a sudden turn they came upon a troop of mounted yeomen leading prisoners on foot, and straggling behind their commander who saluted the soldier with a mixture of effrontery and embarrassment painful to witness.

One of the troop carried slung over his arm a brace of poultry with freshly wrung necks, one bore a bleating lamb; bottles protruded from the holsters of the generality. They all leered at the girl as they went by, talking, singing snatches of songs, or shouting horrid badinage to the poor wretches who stumbled along with pinioned arms at their stirrups. Heathcote and Irene drew rein to let them pass.

"What terrible men," said the girl in a trembling accent as the dust raised by their disorderly march began to subside.

"Gad, they are fit for their captain," replied the officer; "I would lay a wager the fellow is more accustomed to stitching saddles than sitting in them."

As he spoke a whiff of burning straw swept by, and they heard a distant wail; resuming their journey, they soon found the cause. At a little way from them, but concealed by a fold of the ground, were a group of huts, thick spirals of smoke curving above the roof of one

where little spirtles of flame were running to and fro in the placid air. A small crowd of women were endeavouring to quench the fire with buckets of well-water. Nearer, stretched amid a patch of trampled green corn lay the body of a man, a woman moaning above him. In the farthest house there broke forth from time to time a young girl's shrieking, muffled by closed doors, shrieking which told of worse than death.

Horror-stricken, Irene leaped from her horse and ran towards the woman, Heathcote catching at the bridle while he cautioned her to beware. The people round the burning house shrank back at the sight of the uniform, but at a word from Irene resumed their work. Passing them hurriedly, the girl rushed to the closed door and beat at it imperiously with the butt of her riding whip. Almost at the first stroke it was flung open by an awful woman, for desperation is ever awful, armed with a sickle. Irene entered and dashed the door to again.

The woman over the motionless figure in the corn-field bared her breast and cursed with hideous words the Saxon soldier. "Brave, brave man!" she quavered, growing almost inarticulate in her choking rage, "why don't you put your sword here—I'm not afraid now?"

Some women hastened forward, weeping, and strove to restrain her as with shrinking steps she endeavoured to rush across the sunken fence which separated her from the officer, who immovable as the stones beneath his horse's feet, kept his eyes upon the door. He had no sympathy and little pity for the wretched creatures striving to save their hovel. It was not the first time he had heard the screams of outraged womanhood, or watched the cruel flames lick rafter and roof tree into nothingness.

"Oh, where are the men, where are the men?" moaned the frenzied creature in the corn-field. "Oh, come, come," she went on opening her arms to their fullest extent, her grey streaked hair falling about her ears, "Oh come, Timmy, come, Mick, come, Thade, come an' look

at him! Look at yer brother! Yerrah where are Ye God at all, at all? What did we ever do to Ye?"

Then followed a torrent of curses, meaningless, senseless cries that died away into sobs on the bosom of one of the women who soothed her as if she had been a child, but she wrenched herself free again and flung herself down beside the body. "Ah, Tim, yerrah sure 'tis only asleep ye are!" she cried, "sure a bit of a bullet like that wouldn't kill ye? Sure 'tis only laffin' at us he'll be soon! Lift his head! Look at him smiling already. Ah, God, God, God, 'tis his last smile! Never mind, acushla, there are more behind who won't see ye wronged; they are coming, don't ye hear 'em, they have guns and powder and pikes, sharp, sharp, sharp, to spill the heart's blood of the bastard's bastard who laid ye there! They are hammerin' the pikes red hot, as hot as hell and the hate of their hearts make 'em! Oh, you'll know 'em when you see 'em, sir," she went on, with a horrid mockery of respect, addressing Heathcote, "they have points, sir, points to go through your laced coat and black orange heart, and stretch you like him to-day. Sure you must have seen 'em, yer honour's honour, the people do be goin' about buyin' 'em. I knew a man who gave nineteen pence ha'penny for one to give it up agen and save his dirty hide. But, there are more, and they have 'em too, and when they give 'em 'twill be like that!" she yelled, a terrible tremble in her tones, "like that!" And stabbing in the air she fell forward, senseless, between the women who set up a cry of commiseration as they gently laid her down.

"Stand back," cried a distant voice, "give her breath, and don't ye be draggin' the boy about either, maybe it isn't so bad after all."

Involuntarily Heathcote glanced in the direction of the speaker, for he recognised the shrill tones, and saw Nancy preceded by a few gorsoons, hastening across a field, her bag of simples bobbing on her shoulder.

At that moment the closed door was pulled open, and

Irene stepped forth, shutting it almost reverentially behind her. She came down the little slope leading from the cabins, her skirts gathered about the fleet grace of her limbs, her face set, her great eyes dark as night with rage and pity. She seemed to have aged suddenly, but without losing the comeliness of her youth.

A ditch as it is called in Ireland, separated her from what was going on in the corn-field and concealed it from her view. Heathcote, leaping down, assisted her to mount; she muttered a word of thanks, but he doubted if she saw him. As she gathered up the reins some exclamations from the women behind the fence attracted her attention, swiftly turning, she rode over to where they were assisting Nancy who was busy with the wounded man. Leaning from her saddle, the girl uttered a few hurried words in Irish, or rather in that mixture of Saxon and Gaelic so common in Wexford, pointing also to the now silent hut. The old woman nodded, without looking up, and continued her labours, then with a glance at the fire which was now being got under, she wheeled round and rejoined Heathcote in silence.

An instant before, he could not have dreamed that the maid at his side would have acted with such decision, and he had felt springing up in his heart a new and intoxicating sense of her beauty as he watched her descend the slope. It is possible that the mute womanliness of her action appealed to him also, but it was not that roused the sudden fire of desire as he lifted her into the saddle. A few moments before she had been a girl shrinking from a rout of armed men, now she was a woman smitten into sudden, irrevocable womanhood by the agony that wailed beneath the humble roof she had quitted.

They rode on wordless, and Heathcote kept by the bridle path, because he saw she was weeping. It was the first time in her carefully guarded life that the horrors she had heard so lightly discussed had been brought home to her, and she felt through every fibre of her being the insult

to, the outrage on her sex. The tears gave her self-control, and after a while she trusted herself to speak.

"Oh, if I were a man!" she exclaimed, clenching her hand on the riding switch, "If I were a man! I know all those people about here," she went on, looking straight before her. "That place belonged to an estate my father once owned, mother and I used often ride out to this spot, for that very family yonder used to work most exquisite lace designs—they made those ruffles—they always gave their services to us first, rarely to anyone else, and they would take any price we might put upon their labour, trusting to our honour to appraise it. That is the youngest girl; she helped to make the lace shroud we wrapped round mother's head the day we laid her in the coffin. They were simple, honest folk who never wished harm to aught—and to think that things calling themselves men—soldiers—should—should—her brother nearly killed one of them, that must have been the brute with the bandaged face we passed. But, they left him for dead. No matter! He is no man who would not do the same for the sake of the poorest woman who walks the land of Ireland!"

Heathcote philosophically permitted her passion to wear itself out. He was not unfamiliar with this phase of emotion; he had seen a young lieutenant whose name was one day to be a word of loathing terror along the Carnatic, blubber over a child dead in its dead mother's arms, and cover the sight with his cloak, though round him raved the horror of a taken town.

As they neared Malplaquet she appeared to master her grief, drying her eyes too, carefully. "If father finds I have been crying," she said with a pale smile, "he will be troubled all the day. Besides," she continued, womanlike, turning to him, "it may not be so very bad, perhaps they did not kill him outright? He was very strong. Nancy knows all about herbs, though Doctor O'Grady, he is a pupil of Surgeon Dease, you know, says she should be driven out of the country."

"A sword-cut, I believe?" said Heathcote, with languid professional interest.

"Oh no, they did not come so close, a pistol shot, and then they rode their horses over him, or tried to do so, but the poor things reared."

"Ah, exactly," replied her companion, "it is lucky for him they were not carrying guns. I saw a man once who had been ridden over by some tumbrels, and he was a terrible object; they saved his life, poor wretch, better they had let him die."

"Oh," cried Irene, "Tim's sisters would not mind that if only they could keep him with them, they would support him gladly, for he was a good son and a good brother."

Then, such is the force of breeding, she became conscious of a little shame at having displayed so much interest in the fate of a mere popish peasant, a feeling deepened by the chilling indifference of her escort. Accepting the subject as dismissed, Heathcote with quiet but firm persistence forced her to speak of other things, and before they entered the yard, induced her to ride across portion of the grounds—to inspect the Duke of Marlborough's army in battle array, as he laughingly said—the plan of the celebrated field and disposition of the troops engaged being outline by clumps and lines of fir, the idea of a former owner who had named the mansion, and had thus chosen to perpetuate the famous battle where he had lost an arm.

"You will see his portrait in the hall below," remarked Irene, "the man with the round red face and the Ramilles wig. He was one of the hell-fire club. He hated his son who had become a Catholic priest, although he himself belonged to that religion in early youth, but had conformed to keep the estates. He used to watch his wife, a French lady, most carefully, lest she should enter into correspondence with him. She evaded his scrutiny, however, and often it seems saw her son who had actually

come to Ireland as a missioner. One dark wintry night the father hearing stealthy noises, stole downstairs to find the door unbarred and the dog which used to watch it gone. He took his pistols and left the house. Guided by some instinct, he came upon his wife and a man in conversation not far from the Hermitage. Warned by the growls of the dog which recognised him, they endeavoured to escape, but too late, for he fired once and again. When the smoke cleared away he found his wife on the ground, dying, but no trace of his son. He did not suffer from remorse it seems, though the dog, being only an animal, died through grief after its old mistress. But, he never married again, though he had other children by certain ladies whom he caused to be painted as goddesses on the ceiling of the drawing-room, and so he led his life until he broke his neck."

"Gad, what an old reprobate!" laughed Heathcote, turning his horse's head in the direction of the house, "I heard something of this before. Was he an ancestor?"

"He was really a distant relation of the family," replied Irene, "his name was Devereux. A general name about here," she went on, blushing.

"And is that all?" asked the soldier.

"All!" replied the girl. "Is it not enough? True stories always break off in the middle. The ranks of Marlborough's troops are sadly thinned," she continued, with a woeful little laugh, "Papa thought those yonder needed air, so he had several cut down."

They were now riding together under the great arch of the courtyard, in the centre of which an earlier owner had had his initials traced, Italian fashion, in coloured tiles now stained and battered by countless hoofs. Assisting Irene to dismount, Heathcote, since Mat did not appear at once, led the two horses into the stable, which stood hospitably open. As he slipped saddle and bridle off Lightfoot, he noticed that the animal looked more jaded than he had expected. Seeing Mat, who had mean-

while shambled in, busy about Aileen, the soldier with the unceremoniousness of a trooper rubbed the mare down himself, afterwards fishing out a roomy stall and spreading straw there liberally, Lightfoot craning her long neck and whinnying with pleasure.

Presently Mat transferred his attentions to her, conversing learnedly with the master on brans and mashes, Heathcote answering at random. After a while the latter went to the dilapidated rack with an armful of sweet fodder, and found therein a long pole swathed by "sugawns." Taking it out to put in the hay and dried clover leaves a gleam of steel through the straw made him idly pull asunder the swathes which slipped down the polished ashen haft and gave to light a graceful weapon balanced to a feather's weight, its long head the colour of a ploughshare brightened by spring furrows, tapering to a deadly point and armed with an edged hook. Thus Major Heathcote saw at nearer range the pike of Ninety Eight.

The length of the weapon obliged him to hold it point foremost through the open door. Mat watched him furtively.

"I suppose you know what that is, sir?" he said respectfully.

"A pike?" said Heathcote looking over his shoulder.

"Begob, you're right, sir," replied the industrious "bhoy." "They do be bringin' 'em here every day for the master to burn, or break up or send somewhere, an' then they gets protection orders for 'em. Sometimes they buy 'em to give 'em up again."

"This is no sham," said the soldier poising the queenly weapon, "Gad, 'twould be a pity to smash it!"

Mat gave him a queer look, "Och, maybe it won't be broke at all," he said, busy with Lightfoot's drooping crest, "there's a couple more in the corner, an' maybe they'll be left there an' forgotten till we want griffaun handles in the spring."

"Soh. This is good against cavalry?"

"I suppose so, sir,"

"But you will want a pretty deep line—say three?"

"I suppose so then."

"Don't suppose anything: a soldier should know. You are in the yeomanry?"

"Oh wisha, don't suppose anything of the kind, sir, they wouldn't take a poor bodacht like meself," replied Mat, a twinkle in his eye.

Heathcote tossed the pike aloft and laughed good-humouredly. There was about him in a marked degree the truculent bonhomie of the born soldier, a characteristic which gave him in the eyes of his inferiors a reputation for bluff comradeship that went far to strengthen his influence with those under his command. Moreover he suspected Mat knew more than he chose to tell, and he knew that before long he might be called upon to face the pike in battle array; the weapon interested him, the care and finish of its manufacture being more business-like than he had anticipated.

"Come hither, and let me see how you use this pike of yours," he said carelessly.

"Och, sure it isn't mine, yer hanner, God forbid, it's Jemmy Desmond's, he surrendered it to-day to the master," answered Mat with an eye to the windy side of the law as he sidled up to the other and took the weapon Heathcote relinquished to him. Stepping into the yard, he assumed the position known as "Guard" in bayonet exercise, when he gave a series of thrusts and parries, feints and wards which reminded the soldier of quarter-staff.

"'Tis a good weapon," said Heathcote judicially, "but a thought long."

"Arrah, you can shorten it aisy," replied the man, and as he spoke the smooth handle darted back through his glowing hands until little more than the point was visible beyond his chest, then it darted forth with seemingly

resistless force, a quarter, half, almost its entire length. "A sword wouldn't be much use against that, sir?" he said, pausing, his grey Irish eyes aflame.

"I am not quite sure," replied Heathcote lazily, unsheathing his own and stepping forward. "Guard!"

"Oh, God, I wouldn't for the world!" cried Mat, "if anything happened the master would kill me."

"Nonsense; guard, you croppy. You know too much about it not to be a good instructor. Come, hah!"

Mat made a slight thrust, Heathcote put it aside. "Quicker!" he exclaimed. "One, two, three, ha!" There was another clink of steel.

"Good," continued Heathcote, like an experimenter recording his observations. "Parry in carte at six feet should put it by; at closer quarters half arm and the forte of the blade should do. Again!"

Again lounge and parry, then suddenly Mat feinted, Heathcote sliced the unresisting air, and the cruel pike point showed past his shoulder. He laughed and threw himself on guard once more. Lounge and parry succeeded each other rapidly for a few moments, both men growing interested, the fiery English eye watching the Irish one, purposely expressionless. Then swiftly, as Mat delivered a thrust, Heathcote parried lightly, leaping forward as the pike flew back, the sword blade falling before him the fraction of a second, and the pike-head shorn off two feet from the locking ring, clinked on the stones. An oath of admiration burst from Mat as he bounded forward with a twirl of the stout ashen handle which would have stunned the other armed as he was, had the play been earnest.

"Bravo, bravissimo!" laughed Neville who had come out to bring his guest to luncheon. "How many of the Ninth would do that?"

"Every one of them," said Heathcote sheathing his sword.

"Egad, I think they will get the chance," replied his host. "Gash, who was here just now, tells me that there

has been fighting at Naas and Carlow. Are not some of the Dragoons up there?"

"Yes, and the Fourth too, and some of the Romneys; I inspected them last week. Lord Gosford is in command, Mahon of ours is at Carlow. How did it go?"

"Oh, they tried to surprise the town, but Gosford had information and sent some of the Fourth out as videttes. The rebels got into that open space by the goal—most appropriately—where the troops were under cover, and were of course beaten off. They were commanded by one Reynolds, but he got away, though they shot the horse. I believe there was talk of treachery at Carlow, Crosbie who is there——"

Heathcote gave him a quick glance, and bent his brows. "They say all sorts of things at these times," he said, laughing, "I fancy there is not much to be apprehended from people who are ill-advised enough to attack stone buildings with rifle fire. They had no cannon?"

"Not a piece; sure that's what made a show of them when they went to France for help, they didn't know how to cast guns even if they had the chance. What do you think of it?"

"Anything or nothing," replied Heathcote lightly. "Pardon me," and he stepped back to the stables for the pistols which he had left in the holsters. "Look ye," he said suddenly addressing Mat who had just thrown the pike-head aside, "I found this near the mare's stall a while agone when I was attending her. Did you put it on? She was a little tired to-day, but not a bit lame, there was no occasion for bandaging the hock like that. You seem to have a high conceit of your veterinary skill, my friend." And he held up a piece of thick felt cloth with a clumsy buckle attached.

"I thought she was goin' lame last night, sir," replied the groom with his stolid grin. "She walked like it when yer hanner brought her in."

"And sure you needn't go bandage her hoof you

omadhawn," exclaimed Neville, taking the cloth and examining it. "There's the print of the shoe!"

"Och, no, but I suppose it worked down," answered the ingenuous "bhoy," scratching his head. "I was afraid she was a bit weak on the off foreleg."

"Well, she is not," said Heathcote tartly. "She's sound in wind and limb. All she wants is to be left alone, and not made the subject of experiments."

"Sure, I meant for the best, sir," replied Mat humbly.

"Oh, of course, I've been meaning for the best all my life," laughed Neville, "and ecod I'm not so sure it helped me much. Anyhow, attend to what the major says, and give her a little mash—not too much—she'll work that down I'll go bail. Come along, Heathcote, you must be famished." And taking the soldier's arm, they strolled over to the side entrance where Miss Prudence appeared at the moment, Mat looking after them, the cloth in his hand, and on his face an expression it would have puzzled a Lavater to define.

CHAPTER VI

THE evening again saw a large company gathered round Neville's hospitable board, a company not quite so influential as that of the preceding, but much more vivacious. It was composed principally of some lesser squires in the neighbourhood, a Doctor O'Grady, Mr Gash, who looked in, three yeomanry officers from different stations, Fanny Gore, her gallant brother, Miss Nellie Bird of Carnew, and hers a large-eared lout, one of Mrs Poppepper's numerous daughters, and a romping young thing of forty, Miss Edith Hastings.

Politics were largely on the tapis, but the guests took care they should not suffer from the disadvantage of being treated as a serious subject, as they simply formed the background for a torrent of broad anecdote, pointed repartee, and equivocal witticism whose phrasing showed small regard for the hypocrisies.

On the retirement of the ladies the conversation swept along even more briskly, to an accompaniment of oaths their presence had, grotesquely enough, restrained. Military affairs were discussed by the other officers with a recklessness of statement which shocked Heathcote, secrets concerning the strength of the various establishments in the south of Ireland, means of transport, questions of supply—commissariat—were all babbled about in the hearing of the servants. Scandalous derelictions of duty were openly laughed at, flagrant disobedience to orders related amid approving murmurs, and at every moment a profound contempt for discipline and a frank recognition of the fact that their sole business was to drive the country to rebellion, ostentatiously paraded.

"The damned Papist rats!" cried Mr Bird, "they served me as they served Har Gore t'other day, but we paid 'em back with a vengeance. My father shot plenty of the wretches at Carnew, and I pitch-capped eight of 'em with my own hand at New Ross a week ago. 'Twas great, sink me! Old Johnson winks at it, although he gets anonymous letters every day, telling him the rats will rise—but he doesn't mind."

"How they do squeal when the hot pitch gets into their eyes!" laughed another gentleman, Mr Calton, "Bookey shows great sport up Camolin way, and King too drives 'em crazy by dressing an ass in mass-priest's vestments, but that's nothing to Dublin—I was there a fortnight ago, and went to Beresford's riding-school—'pon my damned soul I pitied 'em!"

"Give me Rawson of the North Corks," said a bottle-nosed man in scarlet and black, who answered to the name of Smith, "zounds, he can make a cat-o'-nine tails whistle! I saw him once sitting in a circle composed of triangles, and by Heaven he had a croppy howling on each, with another row of wretches kneeling on the ground, waiting their turn. Curse me, 'twas better than an oratorio of Handel!"

"Yes, the Messiah, damn me," grinned Bird. "If the North Cork down at the Hermitage, that's Nicky Plornish's detachment, go on as they began, they'll drive 'em mad. Spiritless boors! Why don't they come into the field and give us a shot at them?"

"Well, of all the ways, the best seems to me to be this—pay a few polite attentions to the ladies," observed a thin, pale-faced man in scarlet who had the habit of perpetually moistening his lips with the tip of his tongue. "Flog, pitch-cap, burn the roof over their lousy heads—they'll stand it all, but just do to one of their potato-pussed jades what no lady in the land would take exception to, and pillaloo! All the fat's in the fire!"

The gentlemen laughed, "Yes, the damned Papist

rag-pickers, they're mighty squeamish to a King's man," said "Lamby" Gore. "Many's the time I had a brace of 'em squalling about their virtue, when we happened to look into a cabin of a night to see—if the light was out. But we know what that's worth—'slife, there isn't a woman unraped for three miles round the Hermitage, sink me!"

"Well, the King won't want soldiers at any rate!" laughed the pale man.

"You must have found the ladies very complying?" said Doctor O'Grady, a quick gleam in his patient eye.

"Com-com-plying?" hiccoughed "Lamby." "Oh yes, the bayonet removes their scruples, the hypocritical hussies! Gad that farmer's daughter at Taghmon fought like a mad devil, Calton, when you offered her a little civility—Oh, he's the boy for 'em!" he added, winking at the company.

"'Slife, I carried the mark of her ten commandments on my face for a week," laughed the other, "and all because I wanted her to break one of 'em!"

"Ah, you must take the rough with the smooth, sir," said O'Grady. "Irish women have not learned the trick of the fine London ladies, who fight for their virtue—'sectis unguibus.'"

The pale-faced man turned, muttering "Damned Papist!" his mouth pursed, a look of perplexity struggling with a desire to take offence.

"Pshaw, O'Grady, do not mind them, they are young, we know our friends among the Catholics," said Neville good-naturedly, "they are not all croppies—nor should I blame them if they were," he added, under his breath.

"No!" replied O'Grady, "but, why do you not give us a chance in the House? You give every croppy who can pay a rent a vote, and yet *we* cannot get a seat there!"

"By my word," cried his host, "that's true. The House is treating ye abominably. I remember well

Burke saying, 'Connivance is the relaxation of slavery, not the definition of liberty'; and I remember too Hervey's reply to the address from the Bill of Rights battalion when he declared that tyranny was not government, and that allegiance was due only to protection."

"Who was he?" asked "Lamby."

"The Bishop of Derry," said Neville. "By the way, Gash, I wonder where he is now?"

"At Albano, I think," replied Gash, taking snuff. "They are a queer lot; he was half-mad, like the rest of 'em. God made men, women and Herveys. I wish I was in Italy now."

"Egad, yes," said Neville, who had made the grand tour, and as a consequence exhibited pictures of doubtful paternity in an unfinished gallery upstairs, "though, I daresay it is rather warm at present."

"It's too damned hot," cried "Lamby," who had never been beyond London, "there's no place like Ireland; eh, Gash?"

"You may find it too damned hot before long," replied Gash with a steady smile.

The pale-faced man, shifting in his chair, dealt his gallant comrade a kick under the table. Heathcote, observant of all that passed, caught the by-play, but went on endeavouring to explain to his neighbour the cavalry action at Villiers-en-Cauchies.

"The Northern rascals are a bit quiet," said Calton, "half the disaffection of this country is bred and cherished in the North. They are the most stiff-necked dogs in Christendom though we kicked the Papists out for 'em."

"I was in Downpatrick once," observed Smith, "and I never saw so cut-throat a parcel of ruffians. Everyone looked me in the face and cocked his paltry caubeen, as though he would say: 'Damn me, I'm as good a man as you, any day!' But, they really have a most amusing method of sheep-grazing: they fasten a long rope at both

extremities on one of their scabby hill-sides, and tether the ba, ba to it by a ring, so that she can move only in one direction, a straight line. It's the funniest sight on earth, strike me blind!"

"Hurdles are better," said Neville.

"At least, it is following a classical analogy," remarked O'Grady, reaching for some early fruit, "pro baino, you know."

"Pro bibo?" said "Lamby" thickly, "that's Latin?"

"It's Greek to you," laughed Gash.

"Lamby" endeavoured to focus his squinting optics upon the speaker, and failing, sank back in his seat, a look of tipsy mystery on his face, as he put his finger to the side of his nose, and wagged his head solemnly. Gash began to talk of the early manner of Lucca della Robbia. "Lamby" whistled.

"Gash, you are a deep fellow," he went on hiccoughing, "but you let the croppy slip through your fingers nicely last night." Gash gave him a glance. "Oh, I know all about the adventure," continued "Lamby," "one of the Camolins told me. From information received—he, he—a patrol of them came down by the domain road, and another by the avenue to catch D—— that's Devereux, the croppy—and a company of the North Cork were ambushed in the plantation for two mortal hours, cursing their eyes and limbs and all the fine ladies and gentlemen coming to dinner, some in carriages, some on horseback, some on foot—perpend Gash?—while the Camolins kept moving round by the orchard where the laurel walk is, and whom should they meet riding along it as cool as you please, about ten o'clock, but an officer—he, he. Well, ecod, they wheeled aside to let him pass, and the sergeant salutes him. 'What is your division?' he says. 'The Camolin cavalry, plaze yer hanner,' says the man. 'Aye, I know them,' says he, 'and their fellows in arms, the North Cork,' he, he, and he tips the sergeant a bit of gold. 'I suppose you are on your way to join the

regiment?' he says. 'Yes, sir,' says the sergeant, ten times more respectful, 'we are only enrolled a few days, but we are going to headquarters this evening.' 'Very good,' he answers, laughing, 'you will be pretty soldiers when you get the new carbines my Lord Mountnorris is bringing from Dublin. Oh, and give my respects to Lieutenant Bookey when ye see him,' he says, turning in the saddle. 'Yes, sir,' says the sergeant, his hand to his helmet. 'And my compliments to Mr Gash, and tell him that I hope he'll let me know when he has caught the rascal Devereux. You never saw him of course?' he says, riding on. 'No, sir,' says the sergeant, 'but he's well known to the North Cork who are in ambush by the gate—we are watching for him until the other half of the patrol comes round here.' 'Ah, a very good disposition,' he says, wheeling instantly. 'Well, good luck to ye, and don't forget my compliments to Mr Gash.' And off he went, and they noticed that he had a queer, Frenchy shaped hat on his head."

Gash who had been forced to cease talking during the straggling length of this anecdote, sat perfectly still, his face white, two dark shadows under his deep-set eyes. "He is a very discreet man, that sergeant," he said quietly.

"Yes, is he not?" laughed "Lamby," emptying his glass. "But when he came to examine the tip he found it was a French piece, and now he is beginning to think Devereux took French leave. Eh, Major?" he continued, winking at Heathcote, "they are fine fellows, the Camolins. That's the way to set an ambush, is it not? Well, last night was a night of adventure, by God, for when the patrol was passing this way later they nearly ran against a fellow riding like Hell in the opposite direction. They chased him, but he led them a pretty dance until the horse boggled at one of those high fences, and when they came up to him he was down on his knees examining the brute's fetlock. 'Surrender!' says the

sergeant. 'Oh God, is that you, sir?' says he, 'I ran because I thought you were a croppy.' And then it turned out that he was your servant, Neville, who had been sent on a message. But the best of it is, the mare—" "Lamby" stopped, looked at Heathcote, and burst into a laugh. The other officers held their pimpled faces in a mould of self-conscious gravity as the major looked up.

"Never mind, Heathcote, old boy," continued "Lamby," reaching for the decanter, "we all understand each other, but Gash is General-in-Chief you know. Oh, yes, Gash —stop kicking me, Calton—we'll keep it quiet, my neighbour mustn't know you know. Ah, there's nothing like discretion; haven't you anything to say about discretion, Gash—any Latin?"

Thus appealed to, Mr Gash whose face had been corpse-like, though the eyes burned with a cold flame, said calmly: "Lingua mali pars pessima servi."

"Which means?" said "Lamby."

"Hold your damned tongue," said Gash.

"That's a devilish good motto for a spy," retorted "Lamby," "but a devilish — hic — bad one for a gentleman!"

"Sir!" said Mr Gash softly.

The tone carried menace to the half-numbed brain; "Lamby" recollected with sickening distinctness that Mr Gash had a reputation for dexterity in the use of the silver-hilted rapier in the hall downstairs, and muttering "No offence, no offence, servants of the King, all; slash Hell out of the croppies when they surrender their pikes" —slipped under the table.

Neville looked the indignation which his position as host forbade him to otherwise express, but Mr Gash treated the incident as closed, and began affably to explain to O'Grady a method by which Irish might be made equal to Norwegian fir.

Soon after the company, who had begun to show signs of disquietude, joined the ladies in the drawing-room,

where they indulged in a number of arch pleasantries, "Lamby" making a belated appearance, totally oblivious to what had transpired, and performing with his lively sister the minuet from "Ariadne."

Heathcote was not sorry when the departure of the guests gave him an opportunity of regaining his room. As he stood before the mirror a question which had presented itself to him soon after his arrival in Dublin took now a terribly definite form; what position did he occupy in the minds of the men whom he had met at dinner? He knit his brows sternly at the grim reflection fronting him, for self-love could not mask the answer. Most of the conversation round Neville's dinner-table utterly ignored him, the uniformed rascals evidently rating his opinions no higher than they valued O'Grady. The shameless blackguardism of their talk, the open avowal of their mission of exasperation, the cowardly ferocity of the contemplated massacre of unarmed peasants which the hobbledehoy, Gore, had maundered about, did not trouble him so much as the thought that he, an Englishman, an officer in an honourable regiment, should be made the butt of a company of half-breeds. "Damn it," he muttered, "I have a mind to show them the King's sign-manual stands for something."

The scene between Gash and Gore recurred to him again with wonderful distinctness, and he went over it mentally word almost by word. He recalled the dark menace in the velvet gentleman's eye, and the obvious discomposure of the scarlet ruffians lest their drunken comrade should say too much. "Spy, spy!" he hissed. "Can my father's friend know this? Oh shame, shame, never! But does he, if spy he be, rank higher than the King's accredited agent?" He recalled the nods, the shrugs, the winks, the sudden smile of intelligence when Gore talked about the chase after Neville's servant. What was the meaning of this farce? Must he stand aside and laugh inanely at the dumb show explicable to all but him?

"The mare," he muttered; "why did they laugh? Could they have meant Lightfoot? Would Neville allow?" he put the thought from him. Then he remembered the creature's sluggishness that day, the heavy drooping of her head as she entered the stable, and he swore softly. Well, there was one thing to do, and do at once: go and see if she was in the stall now. He looked at his watch upon the dressing-table, it was half-past twelve. He pushed up the window-sash and peered out; the stillness was absolutely oppressive. He looked down; it was only a short distance from the topmost bud of the climbing roses beneath; he could easily descend by the trellis on which they trailed. Pushing the window up higher, and feeling for the notched button used as a support for the heavily moulded frame, he got on the sill, and began to descend cautiously, the sash insecurely stayed, coming down with sharp crash where his hand had been but a moment before.

He smiled and hung there, listening, an instant, then, finding that the noise did not attract any attention, slipped carefully down the fragile ladder, and reached the gravelled walk below the great windows of the dining-room. Following this, he came upon a formidable obstacle he had not expected—a high, stoutly-timbered spiked gate defending the entrance to the irregular quadrangle of outhouses flanking the mansion. "Hum," muttered the soldier, passing his hand over the woodwork, "this has been done since my time. Strange I did not notice it to-day—damnation!"

A small wicket in the door opened suddenly, and nearly precipitated him into the yard; at the same moment Shot, who had been sleeping in the kennel by the kitchen porch, sprang forward with a low growl which would have risen to a raucous baying a second later, if he had not called to her softly. "Aha," he whispered, as she sniffed his skirts, "you are not unaccustomed to midnight comings and goings!"

Patting the animal's head, he stepped across the yard towards the stables, Shot following, her head to the ground, her tail wagging ingratiatingly. At the door he paused and listened near the unguarded aperture in the wall which served for ventilation, whence a faint smell of horse-flesh issued. Somewhere in the darkness a horse stamped and then came a continuous rasping sound, like the grating of a file. "Crib-biting," muttered the major, "that is not a trick of hers." He gave a low whistle. "Lightfoot," he called, "Lightfoot!" There was no answering whinny. He called a little louder but without effect, Shot brushing against his legs and endeavouring to explain the situation. Thrusting the dog aside, he felt the padlock, it was apparently closed in the staple, but a quick pull showed the tongue had not been fastened. Detaching it, he entered, and groping his way to the compartment where Lightfoot had been stabled, felt around, but only the whine and stamp of Irene's mare broke the silence. He stood quite still a moment, his brows contracted, his jaw set. "Stolen by God, stolen!" he muttered.

He put his hand above his head, and felt aloft in the darkness, ah, yes, saddle and stirrups were there. "They left them, the cunning devils," he whispered, "too much noise—How did they spirit her out?" Then he recollected the rag he had taken from the stall the preceding day. "Calkins of course, I might have guessed it!" he said.

Turning fiercely on his heel, he went to the door; all around was wrapped in almost inky darkness, save for the faint glint of summer stars overhead, and through the brooding stillness came the fitful breath of sleeping hedge-rows, sweet almost to pain.

Heathcote debated with himself; to alarm the household did not appeal to his idea of what was due to his host, to climb back into his room would possibly, he reflected, have the same effect, since the window was now

shut firmly. At the same moment he remembered that some contingent of a yeomanry regiment whose name he had been too contemptuously indifferent to retain in mind was quartered at the Hermitage. As the men were detailed for the ostensible purpose of protecting property, he determined to set out there at once, reflecting that the horse-thief could not have got a long start, and that if any effective patrol system were in operation, his capture would be comparatively easy.

The custom of carrying arms had become a habit with him, and recollecting that his pistols were on the table by his bed, his sword on the rack in the hall, he turned back, and took from the crib the fragment of steel-tipped ash he had seen Mat toss back there after their encounter. "'Twill serve," he muttered, balancing the formidable weapon, and then bidding Shot lie down, passed cautiously out through the wicket which he closed, like the stable door, and hastened across the ten-acre field lying before the house, to the gap in the domain wall. Here he got out upon the road Irene and he had followed the morning before, and climbing through another wider one, in the opposite fence near the plantation before the gate, struck off in the direction of the Hermitage.

He had covered about a quarter of a mile when a swift rushing sound struck upon his practised ear, and retreating behind a projecting mass of brambles, he waited, listening, the stout ash grasped firmly. He had not remained long thus when a compact body of men quickly and almost noiselessly came round the curve of the narrow hilly road banked in on one side. They were advancing at a light trot, going four deep; the generality appeared to be armed in some fashion, many with staves, some with pikes, while a few of the flank men carried guns. They numbered he guessed about four hundred, and moved with a certain precision of step for which he was not prepared.

They were followed by several mounted men whose

approach was almost noiseless owing to the muffled hoofs of the horses. Suddenly one of the latter shied, nearly unseating his rider, and the man looking over his shoulder, saw Heathcote dimly, at the same moment a small party in close order halted before his place of concealment.

"What is your name, sir?" said their leader.

"Major Heathcote, Ninth Dragoons."

One of the men laughed bitterly, and shifted his weapon. "I thought 'twas Phil Gash we had," he said, "the coat being black." The horseman in command laughed too.

"Then we met before, sir?" he said.

"Indeed?" rejoined Heathcote.

"And on that occasion you observed that your trade was fighting, not skulking," pursued the other.

"And you will find I am tolerably proficient in it," answered the major, "if you will get a sword lent me and clear a space."

The other laughed again, "I should be happy to consider so moderate a proposal," he replied, "if I had not other work on hand: being a soldier you will make the necessary allowances."

"By the way, you are equipped rather oddly for a king's officer," said another of the horsemen. "That pike-head has a most rebelly significance, and will require a mort of explanation, should you fall into the hands of the yeomanry—You are sure you were not exercising a little on your own account?"

There was a sudden menace in the bantering tone, and a low growl ran down the column.

"Your fears are as ideal as your dream of an Irish Republic, sir," answered Heathcote firmly. "I am no spy: if you wish to know my business, I am looking for my charger which has been stolen by some marauding rascals."

There was loud guffaw from one of the cavalry escort.

"And I am going for help to recover my property,"

continued the soldier. "I conceive I have a right to the King's highway."

"Undoubtedly," replied Devereux, "though, how long it will remain the King's must presently be a matter of dispute."

"I have no diffidence of the issue of that argument, sir," said Heathcote.

"Come, come, where are you going?" asked the other horseman crisply and a distant patter of hoofs twinkled across his words.

"To the Hermitage."

There was another low murmur down the ranks; a sudden, faint, yellow reflection touched the faces of the mounted men, and the polished pike-heads held aloft. The escort turned slowly, the long files, gradually taking shape and substance from the darkness. The hilly road on which they had encountered Heathcote fell away, permitting a view of the misty countryside against whose opaque shadows three or four bright spots were glinting —one was a little brighter than the rest.

A deep hiss of execration raged down the ranks.

"There now, for 'em, that's what they got for giving up their pikes to plaze the priest!" said one man, "that's the chapel burnin'—that's what the priest gets for advising 'em."

"Pshaw," cried one of the cavalry, "I should not care so much about the chapel, it is ten times worse to burn the poorest hovel—God help the women! But, their ravishers believe in God you know."

"You must be a very bold, or a very ignorant man, Major Heathcote," said Devereux between his teeth. "You have evidently lost your way, but, by my life, you will easily find it by the light of burning roof-trees!"

There was a faint challenge from the head of the column, a loud reply, and a horseman came quickly round the upward bend of the road, guiding his steed by the reflection of the fires from the valley.

"Hah, Kelly of Killan!" cried one, "what news?"

"War!" shouted the midnight horseman. "Yesterday morning Prosperous barracks were attacked and Swayne and his ancient Britons and North Cork were piked or burnt to death."

There was a low mutter of satisfaction.

"But there is something better," continued the messenger, holding up his hand. "A detachment of the Ninth Dragoons and Romneys at Old Kilkullen in Kildare were ordered to break a body of pikemen posted on the hilly road by the church, and were cut to pieces after three ineffectual charges."

A cheer thundered down the listening lines.

"Who was in command, sir?" shouted Heathcote, unable to control his emotion.

"General Dundas," replied the new-comer with a questioning glance. "The charges were made in column, two captains, Erskine and Crook, were killed in the last rush. Gad, they had plenty of work to get the men at it a third time. Erskine fought like a devil, hacking at the pike-staffs which transfixed him, in a pool of water by the road. Who is this?" he asked the others in a tone of authority.

The officers closed around him, and a brief consultation was held, Heathcote standing on the defensive and watching the faces of the men nearest, one of which appeared oddly familiar. Then the group broke asunder, and one of the men turning, addressed him:

"You are free to go your road and do your errand—whatever it is," he said with a contemptuous laugh, "but when you reach the hermitage tell your masters——"

"I own no master but King George the Third!" cried Heathcote.

"Tell your masters, the yeomen," pursued the other, his voice quivering with a rage he could hardly repress, "that by the light of God's heaven, hidden from us now, yet sure to come, as God's vengeance, we shall repay this

night's work! Neither Catholic priests nor Catholic bishops care much for us, but yonder chapel belonged to one of the most guileless men who draws the breath of life. It was to-day he got one hundred and fifty pikes surrendered to Plornish, to save the lives of his people—the honour of their women."

"It is war to the knife now," said one of the group, his face twitching in the yellow light.

"War! It has been war for the past week, Clooney," cried the speaker, "fall in; take my message, soldier, and show mercy, if soldier you be, in return for the mercy shown you now."

"In whose name shall I speak?" said Heathcote impressed despite his contempt.

"In the name of the Irish Republic," replied Kelly, lifting his hat. "And so Mr Spy or Mr Officer, go your road—Forward, march!"

The files already formed, began to move, Heathcote fell back, and the column resumed its way, not, however, in complete silence but with a low ripple of oaths as it passed in the faint light of the distant conflagration, and so into the night.

Heathcote looked after them critically. "Ah," he murmured, "war at last! If this cavalry charging up a hill, and burning barracks, be true, they are better spirited than I looked for. Well, we shall see how the irregulars will act. 'Slife, it's odd I should have lost my way, the lie of the land appears changed, there should be a wood here—ha, so, but they have cut it down I daresay, and of course planted nothing in its place, what an accursed country!"

CHAPTER VII

He kept to the road for half-a-mile, now endeavouring to guide himself by the light seen dimly as it died down and anon flared up, the convolutions of the ground and some neighbouring plantations obscuring it at times. While halting to collect his recollection of the country, he was aware of a stealthy step close behind, and springing back, narrowly escaped a blow from a club. A lantern flashed in his eyes showed the next instant the masked faces of some half-dozen villainous skulking figures; it showed his assailants also the gold on his fingers, his seals, and the pin in his cravat.

"Marauders!" whispered Heathcote, making a swift half-circle and dashing out the light.

"A yeo, a yeo, stretch him," exclaimed the other in a kind of whispered shout, "take dat, ye tief!"

Heathcote made an upward cut which caught the man who had struck at him, under the elbow, sending the bludgeon whirling into the air, and wheeling round, struck another across the face with the head of his steel-tipped truncheon; but a second after, he was rushed off his feet and hurled against the side of the fence, his throat clutched by the grimy fingers of one ruffian while his watch and cravat buckle were snatched with lightning rapidity. The success of the robbers was short; exerting his strength, Heathcote now furious, brutally dashed in the face of one with a savage blow, wrenched himself free from the rogue who had caught him by the throat, but who now blinded by his mask, was at a disadvantage, regained his feet, laying about him with the pike-head while the robbers like sleuth-hounds flew at him again,

displaying a kind of base courage, so that having shaken them off for a moment, he was glad to bound over the fence and take to the fields. Trampling through an acre of young corn ploughed with broad furrows, as he quickly found, and plunging through a little thicket, he struck boldly out across the country in the direction of the ruddy beacons burning yet.

Presently he encountered one of those high ditches topped by quickset, so common in the neighbourhood, and on climbing one of the sloping sides at a run, found himself, on descending, amid a crowd of women and girls who had been huddled in the shelter afforded by the angle of its intersection with another.

Poor innocent wretches, their slumbers were but light, for at the sound of Heathcote's hurrying steps they scattered like frightened sheep, with a strangled cry of "The yeos, Lord Jesus, the yeos!"

"Free quarters!" muttered Heathcote, to whom this aspect of military operations was not unfamiliar. Springing forward, he succeeded in catching a girl who was clambering goat-like over a second fence, screaming pitifully the while. He clapped his hand over her trembling mouth, and bidding her have no fear asked her to direct him to the Hermitage.

The palpitating creature lay quite still in his arms after a while, her round eyes staring upward into his, her thin crooked fingers clutching nervously at his iron wrist. He repeated his question gently.

"The Hermitage, yer hanner," she quavered, striving to control a desire to scream at every word, "Oh, oh, oh, don't take me there for the honour of the mother of God!" and she strove to kneel.

"No, no," cried Heathcote, "but where is it? Shall I make it by going straight on?" He held her a little aloof now, the smell of her dank clothing offending his nostrils.

"That's where Nicky Plornish the yeo is," she gasped.

"They are killing the people there, Jerry Saxon was taken over to-night, the light wasn't out when the escort was passin', and his sister is gone across after him. They flogged Judy Desmond yesterday and half hanged my mother—her neck is all a wan side, yer hanner—shure you won't take me there!"

Heathcote shook the girl to and fro violently. "By God I shall!" he swore, oblivious of the absurdity, "if you do not show me the way."

Perhaps some faint thrill of humour touched the shrinking creature's brain, for looking up at him with a pathetic confidence, she whispered, "sure yer hanner is only funnin', it's not far off, sir. Only over there, sir, straight; but you must go along the road, there is very marshy ground near the river, and a bog round here—that's why we come over, because the yeos could not force their horses through it aisy."

"Where is the road?" asked Heathcote.

"About three fields off, sir. Look, I'll show ye!" And she actually moved a little way with him, a fawning smile upon her blanched face.

"Hah, in a straight line, then I shall find it I fancy. I turn to the right?"

"Yes, yer hanner."

He felt in his breast pocket for his purse, it was gone! Worse, the pocket-book which he had used for recording his most private memoranda. The sweat came to his forehead at the discovery; he looked at the girl again. "I have nothing to give you, maid," he said, "save this ring," and he slipped the little circlet from his finger. "It has my arms and name upon it—don't forget the name, Major Heathcote, and if ever you or your friends are in trouble I think it will get you justice, and that seems to be favour in this country."

Breaking away at a quick trot, he crashed through a ragged hedge, hurried across a patch of barley, and climbed another high, earthen bank, drained by a rush-grown dyke.

As he surmounted this he saw dimly below a sunken road, and heard almost at the same time the clatter and jingle of cavalry.

"The patrol at last," he muttered, and descended leisurely. The next instant a group of mounted men came round the turn of the road at a quick canter, but seeing a man in the way, pulled up somewhat confusedly, drawing their swords as if by common impulse. Heathcote did not care to repress a contemptuous laugh.

"Who is in command?" he said.

"I am Sergeant Ralson," replied one of the recoiling crowd, now quite visible in the reflection cast by the flaring roofs of the burning houses. The soldier advanced a pace.

"I am Major Heathcote," he said, "my charger has been stolen just now from my quarters at Malplaquet House. I have encountered a force of rebel infantry on the road yonder."

"I suppose you did," answered the yeoman, coolly, "but what brings ye here?"

"I am going to the Hermitage to get help, but have lost my way—there is a picket station there?"

"There is a damned fine picquet station there," drawled the sergeant, "but what are you doin' with that pike?"

"Curse you, sirrah, mind your own business!" shouted Heathcote, whose temper had not been improved by his recent experiences, "I tell you my horse has been stolen, and you stand there asking insolent questions. Are you here to protect the property of His Majesty's lieges?"

This absurd question was answered in most characteristic fashion by one of the group, who, while Heathcote was speaking, drew a pistol and fired; at the same moment the sergeant spurred forward, shouting frantically, "Cut him down, boys, quick!"

Heathcote, luckily for himself, knew something of cudgel play, and threw up the stout ashen staff in time to escape a slashing blow, but before he could spring back

to get further room, the others flung themselves madly at him, shouting to keep up their courage, and cutting blindly with their sabres, ineffectually the soldier could see, owing to their habit of shrinking behind the horses' heads.

Forgetting that the weapon in his hand was not a sword, Heathcote endeavoured to sever the sergeant's bridle-rein, but only succeeded in ripping some inches of that worthy's coat sleeve, was knocked down the next instant by the plunge of a rearing charger, and after a desperate struggle, found himself a prisoner, his arms securely pinioned to his sides, the blood trickling from a wound on his forehead.

"Well done, boys," panted the sergeant, "he's a desperate character, maybe Napper Tandy himself. Here, Swanton, you tie the halter to your saddle-bow, an' bring him on! Pickering and Swine, ye can make the rear-guard. Ready? March!"

The way was not smooth, nor were his conductors over-gentle, and having cursed them roundly for their stupidity, thereby eliciting roars of laughter, Heathcote cursed himself as he staggered along in their wake, for ever having come to Ireland, and finally cursed Ireland herself with a fluency which had the unpremeditated effect of making his captors doubt their wisdom in arresting him.

"He says he's a major," whispered the man who had fired, "an' sink my soul in hell, if he don't talk Englified!"

"That's only actin'," replied the sergeant in a fierce undertone. "If he's a major, where's his uniform? An' then look at the pike, lucky we brought it on, blast yer eyes, why didn't you fire straight, you had practice enough on the women to-day! Anyhow, we must all swear the one way, an' stick to it—he attacked us an' we took him prisoner, thinkin' he was a rebel general. Hist!"

It did not require a sign-post now to guide them on their path to the Hermitage, for a quivering shriek of agony wavered down the night wind, and then another mingled with the faint chorus of a drinking song. The

road too grew much easier, and presently they encountered a sentinel leaning against a fence, smoking. Passing him with a few words of banter, the party skirted what appeared to be the boundary wall of a demesne, and turning in through a breach in this, they next rode across a field whose young corn stalks had been trampled into a broad rutted track several yards wide on either side. It was occupied by a disorderly picket lounging around a dying fire, their arms tossed away in unseemly confusion, mute evidence of the contempt in which they held the enemy against whom they were supposed to defend the country.

Here the escort halted to talk with their comrades who gathered about them. Heathcote eagerly scanned the rascally faces, hoping to recognise some man who might have been in the vicinity of Malplaquet House, but vainly, they were all strangers in that county, being composed of North Corks, the very cavalry which had made him prisoner having only the preceding evening taken the place of the Camolins whom he and Irene had met, those men having set out for headquarters.

Resuming their way, they skirted a plantation screening a low irregular pile of architecture outlined by brilliantly lighted windows, and at the moment a succession of hoarse shrieks throbbed upon the air.

"It's that small fellow they call Desmond," said one of the troop, "damn me, I didn't think he'd hold out so long; he was hanging by the thumbs when we came away, and the picket peg was all over blood then. Hark, how the lash goes, they are making the skin fly!"

"That must be Saxon," muttered the sergeant, "he's not howling, because Plornish had him gagged. His sister ran over after him with buckles in her shoes of silver, mind you, an' was dancin' the cushion dance for the officers. Sink me, if it wasn't as good as a play in the Cork play-house! She imaginin' they wouldn't

do anything to Jurry as long as she kept 'em in good humour—Christ! I'd like to see her face when she finds they were flayin' Jur all the time unbeknownst! The Saxons are pestilent rebels, eight pikes were found under the mangers in the cowshed covered with about six inches of earth, besides the straw."

The escort now dismounted, the horses being led to stables in the rear, while the sergeant entered the house by a dilapidated portico once imposing with stained glass. Stealthily working his right wrist to loosen the ropes somewhat, Heathcote took in the details of the straggling building before him. It had been designed and built by an eccentric old man, half lunatic, half student, whose active life had been terminated by a wound on the head received in an attempt to rescue Schomberg from the swords of the Irish horse at the Boyne. And now as it stretched away in shadowy perspective it seemed to Heathcote, already familiar with its history, to epitomise both the character and the tastes of its projector, for, jumbled together along its reeling frontage were the styles of many ages and of many masters. There had once been a lawn in front decorated by two fountains, now used as drinking troughs for the cavalry horses, and enriched by marble nymphs whose lichen-stained bodies the yeomen amused themselves by lashing. A shrubbery hid the farther end which had never been finished, and on the side nearer Heathcote lay a garden, once beautiful in the fashion of an earlier day, but long since neglected, a prey to the things of the night, as the house to the bat and the wandering fox, until a week past when Government requisitioned it as a convenient position for a detachment of yeomen intended to overawe the district.

The sergeant's absence was brief, and in a few minutes he reappeared laughing dutifully at some inaudible witticism, and bade Swine bring in the prisoner.

"Aye, bring him in!" yelled a hoarse voice from

within, "let's see what this King's officer who beats the King's troops has to say for himself."

Accustomed as he was to strange sights, Heathcote could barely repress an exclamation as he followed his captor into a room adjoining the entry, probably a breakfast parlour, once gaily decorated with now dingy frescoes. At a table littered by the remains of a late supper, tobacco pipes, spurs, pistols and shattered china, several persons were sitting, some three or four men and two girls—one of the latter holding a guitar and arrayed in tawdry brocade, the other in the usual peasant grey gown, the high neck of which had been turned back in imitation of a *négligé*.

One of the men was sedulously engaged powdering his peruke by the aid of a flour-dredger, another in solemnly painting his breeches with apparently a mixture of meal and pipe-clay; a third was laughing between the girls, while a fourth was heedfully stirring a mixture simmering in a saucepan over a slow fire, a neat pile of conical caps made of linen, or brown paper lying at his side. At the centre of the table sat, or rather sprawled, a man in richly laced scarlet, whose gold epaulets accentuated the cunning meanness of the pale face above them.

"Oho," he cried on catching sight of Heathcote, "so this is the captain or colonel or what the devil—eh, sergeant?"

"Yes, plaze yer hanner," said the man.

"It does not please me at all; it displeases me most damnably," replied the other, leaning forward and upsetting a half-empty tumbler. "So this is the pike, too? Um, a most loyal weapon! Since when were the King's troops armed thus, General? It must be a new order—one fusil and bagnet for infantry, one sabre and pistol for cavalry, and devilish bad I say; they might have given us two, seeing how we are risking our lives every other day."

"Every day!" interrupted the man between the girls; "don't make two bites of a cherry."

"Who is in command?" asked Heathcote.

"I am, my buck," replied the man powdering his wig, "but my commission got stopped on the road, like your own I daresay; we cannot be too sure of the mails those times."

"No, curse you, Plown, I'm in command—General James Nash, at your service," shouted the gentleman who had been engaged brushing his buckskins, and now beginning on the somewhat tarnished lace of his coat. "Like a command? We are just about to raise a troop of green-livered Papist yeos, who are to cut our throats while we are fighting the rebels. You are come in the nick of time by Gad, the Dunlavins want company."

"No, no, here's our generalissima!" cried the man with the girls, taking the brocaded damsel on his knee and jigging her up and down; "her word is law in this fortress; she's the gamest little strategist from here to Dublin, ecod!"

"Oh, is she, Thorncroft; where do you leave our pearl of grass widows, Mrs Kitty Creagh?" roared the man with the wig, flourishing the flour-dredger, so that the top flew off, and he began to laugh drunkenly.

"Silence! I am in command, since you wish to know," cried the man at the table, who had been endeavouring to read Heathcote's contemptuous face, "Nicky Plornish—ever heard of him?"

Heathcote disclaimed the honour.

"Then you see him now," roared the other with an oath, "and you'll remember as long as you live. Here, G—d damn you, what's your name?"

"Major Heathcote, Ninth Dragoons."

"Where's your commission?"

"You must take my word for the present, sir, as I have been robbed of my pocket-book containing it, as well as of my horse."

At the words the officers looked up involuntarily; the captain bit his under-lip. "Oho," he said, "that's the

tansy from Hell or Dublin, who's going about reforming discipline—as if we weren't good enough to do the King's work our own way. What damnable impudence," he continued, struggling to his feet. "Here, guard, take the ruffian outside and tie him up by the thumbs. 'Slife, I was talking to Heathcote myself on the steps of the Exchange in Cork t'other day—'Nicky,' says he, 'when you go to Wexford——'"

Heathcote swore furiously and wrenched at his bonds. "I never spoke to you in my life, you Irish rat," he cried. "I am an officer in the army, and hold the King's commission."

"Ha, ha," laughed the other, reeling round the table, so that he might be nearer his victim, "how he talks of the King! When did you see him last, sir? Pray, how is his health? Oh, Odd's life, I revere His Majesty. I'm a seven months' child myself!" And putting one arm akimbo while he lifted the other, the ruffian cried, "Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

He staggered a pace nearer, and Heathcote measuring his distance, dealt him a kick in the stomach which sent him reeling against the man stirring the pitch, upsetting some of the boiling liquid on the worthy's legs, thus turning that hero into a perfect volcano of blasphemies, as he spun round and round endeavouring to rub off the scalding tar.

"Suaviter in modo, by Jazus!" said the man with the women. "Harrison, you canting cut-throat, have you not been told that you cannot touch pitch without being defiled? Oh, blessed privilege, so rarely granted to the preacher, of seeing his own words proved true. 'Slife, I should not be surprised if the fellow were not a King's officer after all!"

"If he were the cracked devil himself, I'll make him repent it!" howled Plornish. "Here, Ralson, in the King's name down him! Get the scissors, and by G—d I'll teach him to play croppy in earnest!"

A savage struggle ensued, but ere a minute had elapsed Heathcote was flung on his back, and his hair snipped short by the ready steel, an operation grievously retarded by the victim, who had wrenched one arm free.

Meanwhile, the girl with the guitar being abandoned in the melée, rushed stealthily through the door left ajar past the laughing sentries who roared jibes as she sped towards the arched gateway leading to the yard where the lash was busy, and the horrid work of torture went on by the light of a fire whose lurid blaze now veering on this side, now on that, lit the yeomen to their task about the groaning triangles.

What she saw there need not, fortunately, be described, but it wrung from her a shriek so loud, so appalling, that the companies dozing in the outlying plantations mumbled drowsy curses, accustomed as their ears were to the screams of women. Then, with lifted skirts, she flew back along the flickering shadows to the room where Plornish reeling heavily, was endeavouring to plant on Heathcote's head a cap of stout brown paper smeared all over the inside with boiling pitch.

Arrow-like, she sped across the patch of sanded floor, and flung herself at the ruffian's throat, his face the next instant being blotched by the tar from the cap she snatched away, and dashed across his eyes. A scene of frightful confusion followed. Plornish screaming with pain and rage, danced hither and thither, striving to shake her off; but like the maddened thing she was, she clung the firmer.

"You devil, you sneaking devil, after all I done to gag him an' beat him to death! He is dead I tell you! Oh, Jurry, Jurry!"

"Take her off!" cried Plown looking round but without offering to stir, "don't you see she's choking him—devil's cure to him?"

Thorncroft sprang forward and caught at her hands. "Sergeant!" he shouted, "Oh, God!"

He had succeeded in wrenching one away, but swift as lightning flash, the woman snatched a knife from the table and had stabbed him fiercely in the arm, the wound was slight, but it had the effect of making him loose his hold, and the next instant she dealt Plornish a frenzied thrust with its bent steel on the chest where it was turned by his breast badge, and then another at his throat piercing even the thick military stock he wore. Two men of the guard, alarmed at the continued outcry, now rushed in, and pulled the quivering girl away from their gasping commander who was growing articulate again.

"Tie her up," he yelled, "and cut the devil's soul out of her body, and hang her when you have done with her! She's attempted my life, attempted assassination of a King's officer—hang her—hang her!"

She did not utter a word, but with glittering eyes and heaving bosom struggled fiercely to reach him, while from the other side of the table the cowering ruffian taunted her.

"You thought I'd spare your croppy brother, you Hell jade!" he hissed, "for the sake of your char-r-r-ums. Yes, he was gagged and writhing all the while you were playing the harlot. Ah, you Popish wanton, we choused you nicely. How she jumps! I warrant she'll show you ye brave sport, boys, before ye have done with her! Here, out, out with her! Cast her forth!"

And amid the laughter of the officers, the foaming creature, silent as a dying wolf, was slowly pulled to the door by the two men, one brutal of voice and hand, the other thin and lithe, with hot tongue protruding from between his lips—fit incarnations of the twin demons of cruelty and lust.

The officers who had been engaged on their toilette, and who had witnessed this scene with drunken gravity, gathered about their comrade who was dabbing his wrist with alcohol from the table, saying that nothing was better for such a hurt than whisky, in hot weather, and cursing

his captain softly for his clumsiness in allowing the woman to close with him. "For," said the judicious lieutenant, "when a woman flies at you you must make for her hands, else she'd pull you down were you as strong as Samson: so keep 'em at arm's length, boys, and that's the moral of the tale!"

"And a damned good moral for you too," remarked Harrison, who was cooling his hands in a basinful of water, "Her feet reach down to Hell and many strong ones were overcome by her. But what are we to do with this fellow?"

"Picket him," replied Plown promptly. No one took any notice of Plornish who was having his wounds dressed.

"Hum," said Thorncroft, who by accident was the most sober as well as the most intelligent of the party, "that might be awkward for us if he should happen to be in the regulars. Take him upstairs to the strong room, and fling him down there, his hands are tied again, and if he does get 'em loose there are bars on the windows and a lock on the door. What do you say, Harrison?"

The latter uttered a grunt of approbation.

"Have it as you please," rejoined Plown adjusting his freshly powdered wig. "I must be off if we are to reach Taghmon by six. Come along." And they tramped out to where the irregular line of cavalry was forming before the entrance.

There was a sharp knock at the door, a corporal pushing it half open a moment later. The remaining officers turned impatiently with a cry of "Well, Trimmins?"

"Steve Harrigan is at the door, sir," he said, addressing the nearest, "he wants to speak with the captain."

"Who? Harrigan?" exclaimed Plornish whose head was being washed and who had resumed his wig, but fingered his smarting eyes tenderly still. "Hah, very good. Here, bundle this fellow up to the room at the back, we'll deal with him presently. And mind you leave the key on the nail."

A door in the wainscot was pushed open and Heathcote motioned to ascend a dark, narrow flight of stairs. As he stumbled up his quick eye caught the outline of a crouching woman's form, but he made no sign, and staggered after his conductors. They soon reached a landing lit by a spluttering oil lamp set high on a bracket. A door giving on it was unlocked, he was pushed so roughly down a few steps leading into the chamber that he fell, and a moment later he heard his captors cursing heartily as they picked their way down the tortuous stair with its shadow-flooded recesses, into the room beneath.

CHAPTER VIII

MEANWHILE Plornish gave orders for the admittance of Harrigan, and a man clad in rusty black, yet with some attempts at ornamentation, slipped quietly into the room.

As he removed his three-cornered hat he revealed a closely cropped head and the face of the man who had spoken with Devereux on the Enniscorthy road. It was a remarkable one, the brow low though broad, the eye small, but lit by the red light of courage, the nose short, the upper lip long and depressed for almost all its length upon the lower; the chin firm and prominent, the jaw massive, but masked by a jowl of heavy flesh. It was not quite a bad face despite the expression of effrontery which seemed inseparable from it, and the traces of coarse indulgence blotted on brow and cheek. The head was carried well, and there was in the quick stride, and the short decided gestures a suggestion of conscious superiority to the scurvy cut-throats around.

"Well, Harrigan, ye devil, what news?" asked Plornish eagerly.

"Good news, Colonel," replied the man, taking up the guitar and touching a few chords upon it not unskilfully. "Have you pen and paper ready?"

"Yes, of course, you may go, Ralson. Lieutenant Thorncroft, take the depositions. But won't you have a brew, Harrigan?"

"No thank you, business is business, and I have to keep my head cool," replied the new-comer. "Did you see Mr Gash to-day?" he continued, laying down the instrument.

"Yes, he was here yesterday about that damned Devereux."

"Ha, ha, ha, he was not so easily caught as Lord Edward was. It was a cursed foolish thing to send the Camolins who didn't know him, on patrol, why, sink me, he was talking to them in French uniform and gave 'em the slip as cool as you please; I heard him telling Clooney about it this evening."

"Oho, you were exercising?"

"Of course, we intend taking the field to-morrow—or the day after. They are cock-a-hoop over a cavalry blunder at Old Kilcullen, did you hear of it?"

"No," said Plornish, "we understood that there had been skirmishing, but nothing serious. It's not down here?" he added anxiously.

"Not at all—in Kildare I tell you. The Ninth and Romneys charged up a hill against pikemen and were cut to pieces."

"There now for you!" said Thorncroft stifling a yawn, "that's the treatment the regulars get, and they are always crowing over us."

"If such things be done in the green wood—" began Harrison, who wrapped up in a cloak was half sitting on a bench at the other side of the room.

"Go to sleep, curse you," laughed Thorncroft, "we've had brimstone enough for one night. You're a credit to the foundlings' home in Blackpool — they teach Scripture well there anyhow."

There was a general laugh at this, and Thorncroft who had extracted a sheet of crumpled paper from a cartridge box, pulled a quill from the bunch of feathers in the spy's hat lying on the table, and began to fashion a pen with it.

"'Slife, what do you mean by that?" shouted Harrigan in affected anger, "that's my badge of office, my nice bunch of hawk's feathers," he continued, re-arranging them, "that I got myself over in the bog by

Coolmore where the water-hens and the women are hiding."

"Hawk's feathers?" said Thorncroft examining them. "By my word you are not in borrowed plumes, Harrigan."

"Aye, my man, you never spoke truer words," replied the other. "You go out with drums beating and colours flying, and a trail of armed men at your heels, to shoot the croppies and kiss their wives and rob the hen-roosts, and think you are great men when you have half the mothers in the barony hiding their daughters in the hay-ricks; but I—I've neither drum nor trumpet, yet I go amongst maddened men with arms in their hands, and fool 'em to the top of their bent! Aye, though I am at the mercy of a look or a word! But I'm Steve Harrigan the spy, and you are Lieutenant Thorncroft of His Majesty's forces."

"Never mind, we'll get you a fine aigulet," laughed Plornish, "you'll be a general officer yet!"

"By Heaven I'd be as good as some of 'em, though I say it, who shouldn't. I'd know better than to send a body of horse with only a front of eight up a hill against pikemen," laughed the spy. "And whatever feather I wear, it won't be the white one, by G—d!"

"Here," interrupted Plornish, "since you won't drink, let's get to business."

"Aye, that's the talk!" replied Harrigan. "Well then, I have a little surprise for ye, do you know who is in my corps—Billy Simmonds."

"What?" said Plornish. "The thief who sent two dozen of ducks and the butter yesterday? Write that down, Thorncroft."

"Devil a less," answered the spy. "Then, you have the two Corleys from Glynn and Thade Murphy—no not Micky, he died yesterday I think?"

The officers smiled. "This morning," said Thorncroft. "We didn't bury him yet; as he was in the regiment we are waiting until we get orders to perform the obsequies

with military honours. He's upstairs now, with a few others holding a quaker's meeting."

"Then, there's Tim Mangan and Jurry Saxon——"

"Aha," cried Plornish, "he was not on parade to-night?"

"But he was!" swore Harrigan, "he was one of my right hand supporters!"

"You're a damned liar," said Thorncroft coolly, "he's on the triangle—or what is left of him."

"Go on," remarked Plornish, with a villainous grin, "it will be all the same in a hundred years' time."

A shadow darkened the spy's face a moment, and he looked upward as a prisoner at the bar might when he hears the death sentence. "Bah!" he muttered, shrugging his shoulders. "Then, there is Luke Sinnott."

"That's the mass-priest's brother?" said Thorncroft.

"The same!" replied Harrigan, "and a damned good name for a priest. Next, Jeremiah Duggan."

"Duggan of the Cross—the smith?" cried Plornish.

"The very same!" retorted Harrigan. "Now! Where would ye be for me?"

Plornish swore. "The hell-born ruffian!" he shouted, "and he made a to-do about the surrendery of six blades of pig iron not fit to stir the fire with!"

"Well, friends, he had on show twenty sword blades—a damned deal better than any of yours—made out of filings and cast horse-shoes, and set in regulation hilts."

"I trusted Duggan," Plornish went on, unheeding, "for the people seemed to hate the very sight of him. Why, damn me, the patrol went past his house every night a purpose, on account of his coming here snivelling about his neighbours, and being persecuted!"

"Then, there's Kitty Creagh," said Harrigan demurely. "She's promised three loads of potatoes, and her father the miller at Taghmon will give ten barrels of flour."

"Kitty Creagh!" gasped Plornish, with an intaking of breath, and he looked around.

"Yes, indeed, Kitty Creagh," repeated Harrigan. "You haven't her on the triangle—a woman?"

"No, but you have her on your list, which is much the same thing," laughed Thorncroft.

"Gad, yes, I have her on the roaster sure enough!" retorted the spy—"Oh, I'm in all the secrets of the babby-house, thanks to the letters Gash forged—he's a genius. But, you seem surprised?"

"Why — why — she's one of us!" said Plornish. "Didn't the White-boys kill her husband?"

"Go vore a-deering, that's long ago. Ask Devereux when you catch him, who sheltered him the day after he killed the yeoman out by the Blackstairs. I believe she scratched Calton's nose, she don't like the Camolins."

"Faith, she didn't scratch mine!" swore Plornish with a foul oath.

"No, she only led you by it," sneered Thorncroft. "She told Harrison you were the finest man she ever saw in uniform."

"And she said you were like a farthing dip under an extinguisher," growled Plornish. "Wait a bit—Here, Kitty, Kitty! Where the Hell is she?"

A woman's scream of mortal agony throbbed upon the night air, as if in answer.

"That must be Hetty Saxon," said Plornish thoughtfully, "she nearly took my life just now. But, by Heaven, she'll remember it while she lives!"

"Yes, and little fear that her memory will fail through old age," remarked the spy, taking a pinch of snuff.

"No—by G—d!" swore Plornish. "But, where's the widow, she was here a moment agone?"

And he entered into a rambling account of what had taken place, yet, avoiding any reference to Heathcote. Thorncroft and Harrigan looked round apprehensively, the latter swore.

"Why did you not say so?" he cried. "If she only heard half——"

"Make your mind easy," said Thorncroft, "she went home as she usually does about this time; they have a farm here. You may be sure of that, she went away when you came. Why, where could she be?"

The spy glanced at the door let into the wainscot. "Maybe she's behind that?" he cried. The officers exchanged a look, the other saw it and sprang to his feet.

"Damn your diplomacy!" he hissed. "Do you not know that my life would not be worth an hour's purchase if that sly hell-hag knew my game? You and the rest of you are damned already, but, you are only yeos. But, by G—d, the hearthstone of Hell wouldn't be bad enough for me, if all was known! Curse you, is that how you treat your friends? Damn you, do you know who I am? A man of more value to the Government than the lot of you!"

Plornish staggered to his feet, half-sober, his face pale. Thorncroft stepped noiselessly to the door which he opened suddenly, the spy and Plornish at his elbow.

"Nobody could be there," he said in a tense whisper. "It is only a few minutes ago a couple of men were up to —see if all was safe."

Harrigan took from his pocket a mask he carefully arranged over his face. "I'll see for myself," he said.

"How infernally cautious you are," said Thorncroft contemptuously. "You look like a highwayman."

"And I don't look anything I'm not, my buck," muttered the other. "I'd swear I heard something!"

"Pooh, a mouse in the wainscot," said Plornish.

"It's a mouse maybe, that would gnaw asunder the strongest net ever woven," said Harrigan uneasily, taking one of the candelabra from the table, and drawing a pistol. Plornish snatched up his sword, Thorncroft took his, and with a glance at Harrison sound asleep on the settle, the three commenced slowly to ascend the stairs, the spy holding the light aloft, the pistol cocked, his stunted forefinger flicking back the lid of the powder-pan,

their shadows projected in grotesque yet sinister phantasmagoria along the walls and plastered ceiling. The head of the stairs was soon reached, and here they paused, glancing at each other, and speaking in subdued voices.

"Where does this room lead to?" said the spy, pointing to the door of that where Heathcote had been immured.

"Nowhere," replied Plornish, "'tis the strongest room in the place. There are bars on the windows, the old crack who built this ramshackle raree-show kept his plate there. I keep my prisoners."

"And they don't spoil," laughed Thorncroft.

The spy held the light up and looked around. They were at the head of the stairs, but the landing instead of terminating at the opposite wall, was prolonged into a balustrade-guarded passage leading to another door apparently locked, like that communicating with Heathcote's. The spy went forward and turned the handle, the officers exchanged a significant glance. The door swung back, and as it did the listeners thought they heard a faint crash of splintering wood-work. Raising the light, Harrigan looked into the room, then levelled his pistol, and a moment after recoiled, cursing horridly.

"Damn you, what joke is this?" he cried, turning to Plornish who was not smiling now. The candle-light revealed three human bodies suspended from hooks attached to a transverse beam running across the ceiling, their uniforms were those of the North Cork.

"A tribute to your own handiwork," said Thorncroft, "don't you remember those are the lads you sent information about, last week? United Irishmen? They were court-martialled this morning."

"Oh, so I did!" replied Harrigan slowly. "Half the regiments through the country are rotten with 'em, there's the Upper Kells and the Clane and the Antrims—the Clares, and the cavalry of Hunt's down here."

"Well? You're not afraid they'll peach?" remarked Plornish.

"No, no—dead men. But, how quick you were!"

"Aye, I just got 'em decoyed up here, had 'em disarmed, gagged, held a court-martial, and in ten minutes they were hanging as you see 'em now."

Harrigan turned back along the passage. "What a queer old place," he said, looking around. "Gad, it's nothing but cob-webs and corners!"

"Yes, it's the damndest old fortress I ever garrisoned," replied the other staring hard at the bracket where the light had been. "It's all nooks and crannies—sink me if I know half of 'em."

"And this is the strong room?" said the spy, carelessly knocking on the panels of the door with his pistol butt. "Anyone there?"

The words were apparently addressed to Plornish, but the tone was louder than necessary. The syllables reverberated drearily in the succeeding stillness. A look of perplexity came over the captain's rat-like face: the spy gave the door a gentle kick, and it swung open, revealing a room approached by two or three steps, and quite dark, the single window it boasted being shuttered. Harrigan held the light on high and looked in; a second later Plornish uttered a cry of dismay. It was empty.

"Aha," remarked Harrigan, whose sharpened wits translated the tone. "The bird is flown?"

"But not far, you may swear!" shouted Plornish, and followed by the others, he dashed across the gallery into the room they had just quitted.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN the two men who had conducted Heathcote upstairs came cautiously down again in the semi-obscurity their gaiters almost brushed the dress of a woman crouching in a little recess at the foot, which had once been used as a china pantry, and had they been less preoccupied, they could hardly have failed to be aware of her presence, for she was quivering so violently that the chattering of her teeth was audible in the darkness. But no sooner had the door been slammed behind them than she stole forward, opened it a finger's breadth, and peeped through just as Harrigan entered the room. Then she closed it noiselessly, and setting her teeth on her full, white under lip, remained listening intently during most of the foregoing conversation, still as a graven image—even her panting respirations controlled —her skirts gathered together in one hand lest an unguarded movement should cause them to rustle. When, however, the spy mentioned the name of Kitty Creagh, she gently released the handle, and stole shadow-like up the stairs, with footsteps light as thistle-down on summer wind, a moving shade herself, the face absolutely bloodless, the large, distended eyes glittering like jewels.

At Heathcote's door she clung an instant, listening to his low-muttered oaths and muffled struggles with the binding rope, her hands creeping up the sides of the wall by the mouldings until they encountered the key hanging where the yeomen who had locked the door placed it.

"Keep a good heart," she whispered, "I'm here, a friend." Then she opened the door, pressing close

against it so that her body might dull the clink of the rusty lock and the hinges as it revolved.

"Take care," whispered Heathcote, in answer, "there are steps here."

She felt for them, and then crept down to where he lay on his side, "Will your honour save me if I let you out?" she said breathlessly. "They may shoot you if they find you are an army officer, after all."

"Aye," replied Heathcote shortly. "I have nearly got one hand free, feel for the knot, it is somewhere over my right shoulder."

She obeyed, and found it, but the cunningly twisted hemp defied her trembling fingers, and in desperation she tore at it with her teeth.

"Umph, bite at the single cord," said the soldier, "nay, just there, by my arm. Soh—good wench!"

Nerved by terror, she bit at it strand by strand, and in less time than would be deemed probable, had freed the man's arm; a few moments after, he had himself wrenched away the remaining ropes, and stood upright.

"Hush, hush!" she whispered. Heathcote took one of her hands and kissed it, then he kissed her cold face.

"Will your honour save me?" she panted. "No matter what they say?"

"Yes, yes," he answered impatiently, "if I can."

A beam of light fell through the shuttered casement, and stepping forward, he succeeded in pulling the boards apart. The window gave upon the great yard in the rear where the guard fire was dying down in whitening embers. A triangle composed of stout fir saplings lashed together at the top stood almost immediately beneath; between the poles a human figure hung. It was covered with a piece of sacking, but a glance at the drooping head and the trailing limbs was enough, without the protruding entrails, to show the man was dead.

Heathcote turned away abruptly, for he saw that although the yard was deserted, the bars of the window were too strong to admit of egress that way.

"Come!" whispered the woman.

They emerged cautiously upon the landing, and drew the door after them, Kitty Creagh putting her hands to her ears in an agony of apprehension as it creaked.

"Don't lock it!" she prayed. "It would make too much noise. My God, they may be here any moment!"

They went on tip-toe to the other end of the gallery; Heathcote turned the handle of the second door, and pressed against it, but in vain.

"Hah," he muttered, "it is locked. Get the key yonder, it may fit."

Kitty flitted back, and did as he bade her, but the key would not act. Wrenching the handle violently, the soldier flung himself upon the door, but the great panels held. They looked at each other in silence, tears running down the woman's ashen cheeks. She distinctly heard Plornish say—"But where's the widow?"

"Where did you find the key?" asked Heathcote, recognising her now by the spluttering flame of the sinking lamp as one of the women he had seen below.

"On the nail by the door," she panted. "I put it there again as a blind."

He stole back to the spot, and binding his handkerchief round the head, twisted it from its hold in the crumbling plaster; it was a little crooked, and he increased the curve by bending it against the heel of his shoe. Then kneeling at the gallery door he began to pick the lock. After a minute's continued effort it clicked faintly. He wrenched the handle again recklessly, and it swung open.

Kitty Creagh was the first to look in, and she uttered a smothered cry at what Harrigan was to see some instants later; Heathcote passed his arm round her. "Mutineers!" he said. "I daresay they got no more than their deserts."

Supporting the half-dazed woman, he entered the room and looked round eagerly. It was hung with mouldering tapestry of mediæval pattern and lit by a large barred window, through which the grey fields outside were slowly taking shape and colour. Going to it, he saw below the clipped yew-trees of the garden.

"'Slife, it's a damned rat-trap," he said, turning and surveying the room; "were you ever here before?"

"No," replied Kitty, keeping her eyes averted from the dead bodies, "I was never up those stairs. I knew Plornish had a room here, where he used keep people suspected, so that he might pick information out of them, or frighten 'em by what they saw in the yard. Oh, is there no way out?"

"Well, there may be another door behind this arras; try round by that wall, the old housekeeper once showed me over the place as a treat—oh, years ago, 'twas full of winding passages and trick doors—Od's life, I wish I could find one now!"

"I remember her," said the woman; "they used call her 'Mrs Luttrell' as a mock. It was shut up a long time after she died. Mr Gash has it now, a nice gentleman who does be going about the country —— Ah, thank God!"

She pulled aside the tapestry hanging loose in a detached strip from the rest, and disclosed a small doorway of Norman architecture. Heathcote sprang to her side and examined the stout boards, then he turned the handle which was either very old, or constructed on an antique model. "Locked of course," he whispered. He looked round; there was no weapon within reach, not even a stool.

"It must be fastened on the outside," said the woman; "I don't see any lock."

Heathcote smiled. "Then it may be a trick door," he said; "good lass! Let's try!"

He twisted the handle as he spoke, hearing a jarring

click, then he pushed with all his might, but the oaken timbers did not yield an inch. He examined them more closely now, breathing heavily, and noticing for the first time that it did not lie close under the arch, but went up beyond it at the other side, sinking too below the sill.

"Perhaps they are staple and socket hinges!" he muttered, and endeavoured to lift it bodily. To his surprise it rose, the handle probably controlling some rude mechanism. He pushed again, and it went high enough to admit the passage of a man's body. Beyond all was darkness.

Hurrying back, he took the lamp from the bracket, closing the gallery door after him, and followed Kitty who had already stepped within. Heathcote held the light aloft; they were in a dark narrow passage closed on either side by massive walls, and roofed with rough-hewn stones. The soldier went forward a few paces, and found that the corridor, taking a sudden turn, terminated abruptly in a flight of narrow steps leading apparently to another door. The wall at the right hand side he could see, too, was composed only of reddish flint without any admixture of brick showing here and there in the opposite one, being evidently of great antiquity.

In reality the place where they stood once formed part of the barbican of a mediæval castle built by one of the Devereux family. Once destroyed by fire in the days of Elizabeth, and afterwards when rebuilt, by Cromwell's cannon, the popular explanation for many a picturesque ruin in Ireland, it had become a mere heap of crumbling walls with here and there a fragment of a stairway, until a gentleman of broken fortunes seized upon and rebuilt it rudely, utilizing often the very stones of the former fortress, the passage and steps being simply the approach to the castle well, long since filled up and then cunningly converted into a secret passage by its new owner, who led many years the embroiled life of a raparee, until the despatch of troops against him occasioned a furious action

in which he lost his life. Some short time after, it passed into the hands of the Luttrells, a scion of whom had erected the fantastic edifice known as the "Hermitage."

Of this Heathcote knew little and cared less, his principal point of interest being the door which he could now see plainly at the foot of the steps, and beckoning the woman, he slowly descended. As he reached the last, he recoiled, for there, huddled together lay a human form; on the same instant something dashed out the light and there was a scurry in the darkness.

"Owls and rats," said the officer, as the woman who now followed him uttered a short scream. "Did you fasten the door above?"

"Yes," she answered, "it nearly fell of itself. Oh, God, they are talking on the landing! Save me if you are a man!"

"Yes," muttered Heathcote, "'Slife we are prettily trapped, if this door holds. Yet if the owl could get in we may get out. Stay."

He bent and touched the motionless thing on the flags below. Something crumbled in his fingers, then they encountered a hard, smooth surface, a human skull; the owl fluttered past again, and Kitty sobbed aloud. Heathcote pulled the skeleton and its mouldering rags aside, with scant ceremony, and giving her his hand, led her to where he had seen the door.

"What's that?" she gasped, clutching at his arm as her feet brushed the bones in her path.

"What you shall be one day, my pretty mistress," replied the soldier, gravely.

One white pencil of light was now visible to their dilated eyes, then several. Heathcote felt around the embrasure of the low portal more anxiously than he would have cared to own. Finding the door locked and strongly barred, he dealt its lower timbers a kick, and the iron on lock and hinge clattered crazily.

With eyes accustomed to the grey light of the dawn he

now saw that there was a small space at the top between the lintel and the wood, the door having sagged considerably owing to the decay of its hinge, and grasping it quickly, he wrenched off a fragment of rain-rotted worm-eaten oak actually covered with ivy, which had penetrated everywhere and was clothing the sides of the passage with a whitish mantle, a gush of pure morning air inexpressibly sweet, welled through the aperture, beyond they could see the last star paling in the lovely sky.

Heathcote lifted the door, tore the ivy aside, raised a screen of the same kindly clinging plant that hides so many of Ireland's scars, and half-led, half-carried the shivering woman into the light of the dawn.

They found themselves in the garden, standing in all its mournful beauty and desolation as lovely and as lonely as if no scream of tortured humanity had startled its nesting birds. A thrush was singing somewhere amid the tangled thickets, Heathcote thought he had never heard so ravishing a song.

Treading the deserted ways, still hand in hand, they crossed the flower-plots hastily, and came upon a low gate half hidden by interlaced privet. Heathcote got over this and reconnoitred. Yes, there was the place he had passed last night, there lay the field and its dying watch-fires, but the infantry who had bivouacked had gone, save a small outlying picket far away towards the boundary wall.

He stole forward, and looking along the terrace before the house, saw that it was deserted also, the cavalry troop like the foot, having departed on one of those raids which made their name a word of terror through the frenzied country-side. There was not even a sentry. The absolute unpreparedness of the garrison hurt him.

"The rascally cut-throats, they are fit to black the boots of the Dumbarton Fencibles!" he muttered, his anxiety swallowed up in contempt. He advanced towards the porch by which he had entered the night before. It was

like the lawn, silent. Entering boldly, he pushed in the door of the main room, knowing that arms were within. The place was deserted too, the pitch was simmering on the fire, the wax candles guttering in their sockets, the table and its trailing litter standing amid overturned chairs, by the wall, and only the snoring of the drunken man on the settle broke the hissing of the tar. On the table were two pistols in a dirty velvet-lined case, the soldier examined them, both were loaded, but indescribably filthy, the lock of one being wetted by the liquor spilled from Plornish's tumbler. With his eye on the open door in the wainscot, Heathcote shook out the priming, and replaced it from a pouch by the case. He was feeling cautiously for some spare cartridges amongst the *débris* when with a snort, the sleeper awoke, rolled from the settle, and scrambled to his feet.

Swift as light, Heathcote sprang forward and struck him down with the butt end of a pistol, then without waiting to ascertain whether the man's fall had given the alarm, he passed quickly towards the entrance to the courtyard, whence the smoke from the mass of chimney stacks huddled away in confusion behind the main building showed that the remnant of the disorderly garrison was busy in the kitchen preparing breakfast.

Seen in the growing light, the fantastic squalor of the place was almost pathetic, pointed gables, toy turrets, bay windows alternating with patches of plaster and timberwork balancing their crazy and peeling frontage on the grim relics of buttress and flanking tower.

The entrance of the yard which roughly corresponded to the tilting ground of the castle, was itself nothing more than a gateless arch formed from a triangular breach in the Norman masonry stayed by iron bands, crested by dandelion, and covered like the rest, with trailing ivy. Just as he turned the angle of the building masking it, he started back with a thrill of horror which his campaigning experiences did not help him to repress. There,

swinging from a huge iron bracket once used to support a lamp, hung the body of a girl, the same who had attacked Plornish he did not doubt, for even now he recognised the torn strips of brocade still fluttering around the half-nude form. The face was mercifully hidden, veiled by the cascade of luxuriant hair stirred lightly by the morning breeze that lifted the ribboned silk around the neat ankles and little shoes that had danced their last dance.

"Poor wench," muttered Heathcote as the naked and dishonoured thing revolved with the breeze, "they have given thee but tavern usage. Thank God this is not England!"

Just facing the body a flanking line of out-houses ran, corresponding to the mews of the older structure, and noting that a neighbouring door was ajar he went to it, his hand on a pistol, hearing the bustle and jest of the yeomen in the kitchen across the yard.

The place was as he guessed a stable, but almost empty; hanging round a post near the door were some hunting crops hooked up by the lashes as they had been put out of hands by the ruffians in the kitchen. Looking round critically he picked out a strongly proportioned bay, possibly the contribution of some farm-yard to the King's forces. He was saddling the animal when he saw that she was secured in her stall by a heavy bar, and was about to search for the key when a quick running step caught his attention.

Grasping a crop, he stepped into the shadow of the door. At the instant a man rushed in, ran to a coat hanging on one of the supporting pillars and was in the act of putting it on when, turning, he saw Heathcote. It was the sergeant who had arrested him the preceding night. The man's hands were entangled in the sleeves and before he could utter a cry Heathcote struck him brutally across the face with the whip.

"One word," he hissed, "and I blow your brains out."

The other shrank back silently, one arm raised, and Heathcote plied the whip again.

"Unlock that bar," he said next, "and get the horse out!"

The yeoman hesitated, but the blow across his face had cowed him, he was unarmed, and he saw that the man before him would keep his word.

"You know where the key is," continued Heathcote, "get it, or"—He levelled his pistol.

The fellow turned slowly and fumbling at an embrasure, produced the key.

"Quick!" muttered Heathcote, "as you value your life." He replaced the pistol. The man unlocked the bar and loosed the mare.

"Now, the bridle," the soldier went on, reaching for the nearest, but at the moment the sergeant who had snatched up a naked bayonet, lying like all the arms in disorder, sprang forward and hurled Heathcote against the wall, shouting—"Help, croppies! Help!"

Though his left hand was entangled by the bridle, the soldier succeeded in catching the fellow's wrist and dashed the loaded handle in his face again and again until he reeled back smothered by blood, while the snorting mare with trailing picket rope cantered past them through the open door. There was not an instant to lose, Heathcote flew after the horse, snatching at the swinging stirrup as she went, but missing it. One moment more and she would have cleared the archway, but seeing the dead body she swerved, and Heathcote grasping her mane, swung himself into the saddle, the affrighted creature speeding out upon the moss-grown terrace before the house. In a few seconds she was past the still-deserted porch and her rider heard a shout from the yard, at the same instant he spied Kitty Creagh whom he had almost forgotten, crouched near the garden gate, and beckoning frantically.

"Steady!" cried Heathcote, striving to control the horse, "get on the wall, quick!"

Then he saw through a gap in the straggling hedge the flame of scarlet and the flash of steel as Plornish, Thorncroft and Harrigan emerged from the postern door having lost many precious minutes in the room above it.

"Halt in the King's name!" shouted the yeoman lifting his sword. "Shoot, Harrigan, quick, man!"

The spy raised his pistol. "It's the major!" he gasped. Thorncroft uttered a short laugh.

"Steady, girl!" said Heathcote as a bugle shrieked from the yard, "your foot on mine—so!"

Kitty Creagh had climbed on the wall and had striven to obey him, but the horse shied and she clung to the withers, screaming—"Ah, for the honour of God, don't leave me!"

At the cry Harrigan darted forward across the tangled flower-beds, Heathcote struck the mare fiercely on the side of the face with his open hand, she swerved once more. He seized the woman, caught her foot under his, and dragged her to the croup, breathless. The action saved the steed's life, for Harrigan bursting through the hedge, came close to the wall and fired, the ball grazing the creature's forehead, Heathcote replied, the bullet tearing away a fragment of the fluttering mask, as the other hurled the empty pistol past his ear, and within a few seconds they were out of range, the girl bidding Heathcote turn into a field of young corn adjoining another whose gate stood open, rather than ride down the avenue where a picket might be loitering.

Harrigan turned to his companions with a volley of curses. "Damn you!" he roared, "why did you not tell me? A pretty kettle of fish you have made of it!" And he pulled off the mask.

"How the Hell should I know he was Heathcote?" said Plornish. "He was brought before me with a bloody pike in his hand after wounding one of the men. I treated him civilly and all the thanks I got was a kick in the belly. Sink me, he wouldn't show his commission or give any

satisfaction. Damn me, these regulars think we're not fit to wipe their boots on."

"Damn Heathcote!" yelled the spy, "I am thinking of the girl. If she heard——"

"She could not," said Thorncroft, "did you not see yourself, she was outside the gate. Heathcote got away by some devilish trick of his own; believe me he didn't waste time eavesdropping. But come hither, there was something on those break-neck stairs, a man I thought —it might be of some use——"

They returned to the ivy-clad door, pushed it aside and looked in, the glorious sunlight flooding all things now.

Just beyond the threshold which had once held the windlass of the well, lay the skeleton in its mouldering rags as Heathcote had left it.

"Ha," cried Thorncroft, "this fellow has done with plotting and scheming a long day! Picked clean too —rats. What's this?"

He detached some few beads of a rosary from the fleshless fingers, and a triangular box of tarnished silver.

"Ah," laughed Harrigan, "a pyx and beads such as Romish priests carry." He moved the rattling bones with his feet, an indefinable expression on his lowering brow, a small volume with leaves welded into a shapeless mass rolled down upon the flags, he picked it up.

"A missal," he muttered, opening it, and glancing at the dim title-page, read—"Hunc librum emi pretio 2 florenorum rhn. 1720. Jean Devereux, S.S. Theologia in annum primum candidatus."

"That's a damned deal more than I would give for it," he continued, snapping the leaves together. "A mass-priest of course. How did he get here?"

"Possibly he knew the place well," said Thorncroft, who had watched his companion keenly as he read the inscription, "the country was full of those gentry once. Aha," he went on examining the skull, "here is an indentation, it has been beaten in by a bullet. Someone

hunting the fellow, shot him and he crept here to die. 'Tis a pity he was not caught, there was a price upon his head, the same as a wolf's, I believe. I wonder how it happened—the last act of a comedy or a tragedy, which? Pah!" And he flung the head back upon the rags.

"What's that?" asked Plornish who had opened the gate and ordered back some men.

"A dead mass-priest," answered Thorncroft. "You should hear Harrigan reading Latin. He came here to convert us to Popery but ecod, the rats converted him to dry bones!"

"Curse him, let him there, then," returned Plornish. "It's lucky the dog did not live in my day. Come and take some rashers, I smell 'em from the kitchen. Come on, Harrigan, what's the good of poking about a bag of dry bones—he won't blab?"

Harrigan laughed huskily, "No, the cursed fool," he replied dashing down the breviary, but pocketing the pyx. "He has blabbed enough in his day I warrant you. Bah, let him rot there!"

Poor Jean Devereux, persecuted priest of a banned faith, martyr to a savage law, thy kingdom was not of this world, but truly even those who deem thy faith a mock and thy mission a failure, might wish thee a nobler tomb than a niche in a crumbling wall, and a worthier epitaph than a ruffian's jeer.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Heathcote and the woman had ridden about a mile, he guiding the horse under her direction, the park and gables of Malplaquet came into sight. Once sure of his identity, Kitty Creagh showed no reserve, but chatted freely on many subjects touching Neville's family and affairs.

"If all the gentry were like him," she said, "and like Mr Ogle, there would be no disturbance, it's going to Mass the people would be this blessed morning, instead of hiding in the ditches among the briars as most of them are."

Heathcote shrugged his shoulders. "You seem to like Mr Neville?" he said.

"Yes, indeed, and small wonder," replied the woman, "my husband wasn't a saint, God help us! And he never stopped until he joined the Orangemen, and after a bit he quarrelled with 'em—by the same token he'd fight with his toes—and the end of it was, they shot him near his own house, and put the blame on the Whiteboys. There was a man arrested for it, and they wanted me to swear I saw him fire the shot, but I wouldn't, though they let me know secretly that if I didn't our farm near the Hermitage would be taken from me; but of course it didn't make any difference to the man, for he was hanged, nor to me either, for the people shunned me as an informer, and I had no friends. The Orange gang were working quietly on the Gores who owned our land, to turn me out, in revenge for not swearing. Well, Mr Neville found out the truth of the story, he is a magistrate you know, and he stood up for me and made the Gores promise not to dispossess me

—and there I am, from that day to this, thank God! Many and many is the broken heart his dead lady comforted too, nor is there a house round about here that hadn't the light of her smile in it, it was with reason they called her, like her daughter, the 'Rose of Coolmore.'"

"A rose worth plucking also?" said the soldier artfully.

Kitty tightened her grasp on his waist and laughed, Heathcote understood the subtle flattery, and smiled complacently, unconscious of Kitty's face curving archly over his shoulder.

"You may sing it!" she said, "there's Mr Gore—he's cracked after her. He writes poetry to the poor young lady, and he hates Mr Ogle for laughing at it—sure he's the talk of the country, over every day at Malplaquet, instead of up at Camolin, with his 'troops' as he says."

"He's very hard on the rebels?"

"Wisha, no," rejoined Kitty, "only to hear him talking you'd think he was a terror out of Hell, but he'll be a man yet —if he lives for it. Then, there's Mr Blood from Jamaica —where the rum is—and Mr Ware of the North Cork, he'll come in for a pot of money one of these days they say, and there's Mr Gash that Miss Gore is so fond of. He came down here lately, and owns the place where we spent the evening—your honour knows him?"

"Yes."

Kitty lifting her arched brows, smiled again; smiled though only some thirty minutes lay between her and the horror of the Hermitage. But, truly she might well have deemed it a dream under that exquisite blue of heaven reflected in many a stream and thicket-fringed lake whence water-fowl rose on slow-beating pinions, while all around, the lovely country shone in myriad tints of green that melted into the grey distance ringed by the sunlit peaks of the eternal mountains.

They rode a little way in silence, the woman watching her companion's profile, then she said suddenly—"Mr

Gash is a very nice gentleman, he is great friends with Mr Harrigan."

"Mr Harrigan—who is he?"

"Oh don't your honour know him; he knows you then, I'll be bound, he's very clever with his pistol."

"I see, a fire-eater, I must be careful. Does he visit at Malplaquet."

Kitty laughed. "Wisha, it wouldn't be much out of the way if he did," she retorted, "his comrades do. But it's strange your honour don't know him—being a Government man too?"

"I am a King's man," said Heathcote. He was beginning to find out that there was a distinction.

"Well, well, I'm sorry I didn't introduce ye just now—though we were in a hurry. Sure you saw him with Plornish and Thorncroft in the garden?"

The tones were so studiously matter-of-fact that Heathcote at first missed their significance, then he endeavoured to turn in the saddle and read his companion's face, but as he did so she slipped from the charger's polished flank, and climbed a high earthen fence bordering the road; Heathcote reined up.

"The man in the mask?" he cried, his eyes flashing.

"Yes, then, just—the man in the mask!" replied Kitty tranquilly. She had paused out of arm's reach, and stood looking down at him, mockery flickering in her keen brown eyes, a beautiful, elusive figure.

"He looked like a foot-pad," said the soldier.

"He looks like a good many things," said the woman, "and he has a tongue that tied many a halter between this and Wexford, but it wagged once too often to-night. But, keep the name in mind, you'll hear it again. And now I must be going my way—God knows it's a sad one—Good-bye, Major Heathcote—I won't remind you of your promise—and if ever a woman comes into your power, remember Kitty Creagh and what she did for you. Because, by my soul 'tis odds but you'd be lying dead

in that strong room by now, if she didn't let you out."

As she spoke she disappeared over the coping of the embankment. For a moment Heathcote thought of following, but on an instant's reflection, decided to push on to Malplaquet, a puzzled frown upon his brow, and about him that sense of tightening toils which sooner or later comes to every man, no matter what his official position, whom Fortune casts upon the shifting sands of Irish life.

"God!" he muttered, "what a land of chicanery and ruffianism! There is not an honest man amongst them! Nevertheless, King George stands for something yet; then hey for Enniscorthy. By Heaven, Mr Plornish, you'll remember the insult you offered to a regular officer as long as you live, if there be any virtue in court-martials."

He actually thought of riding thither at once, but a glance at his charger and equipment decided him to breakfast at Malplaquet.

His arrival produced some little stir and comment, for although the hour was early the household was up and about in cheerful mood of Sabbath preparation.

On going to the stable he found Lightfoot in her stall as fresh apparently as if she had spent the night there. He examined her fetlocks, but there was not a trace of dust on the polished horn of the hoofs.

"Do you know anything about this?" he asked of Mat who was unsaddling the yeoman's charger.

"About what, sir?" said Mat.

"About my horse being stolen!" cried Heathcote crisply, untwisting the lash of his whip.

"Oyeh, no, sir," answered the man, "she was here fresh and fair when I come down, jest as ye see her now. I'm after giving her a rub-down an' her oats, the poor crature."

The men looked quietly at one another, fury in

Heathcote's red eye, blank incomprehension in Mat's. The soldier measured his distance, Mat was doing the same, as he stood there, the saddle he had just removed on his arm, one hand resting in the most unconscious manner on the butt of a pistol by chance left in the holster.

Heathcote was not more intelligent than the majority of his countrymen, but he understood that a single indiscreet movement would cause a vacancy in the Ninth Dragoons. A truculent smile flitted over his bronzed features, and realizing the futility of question or threat he strode back to the house, to remove the traces of his midnight adventure and to prepare for his journey.

He did not leave Malplaquet as soon as he expected, for he had no wish to interfere with the kindly arrangements of his host by churlishly accentuating his desire to depart. The loss of his pocket-book and papers annoyed him at intervals, though he did not allow himself to connect it with any preconcerted plan. Again and again Kitty Creagh's last words came back to him, and the cry of the masked man in the Hermitage garden. Why should he appear to know him? Why was his face hidden? Then Neville said something about the god which appeared to the Greek envoys at Mount Panis, and Miss Prue asked him whether he would take another dish of tea. He tried to rouse himself, but thought instead, of the man who had stopped him on his way to Malplaquet; there was the red glare in the masked man's eye, the same stealthy alertness of carriage. Could he be the ruffian who stole his papers? Or could the foot-pads who had done so, have acted under his orders?

Just then he caught Irene's inquiring eyes over the brim of her cup and flushing slightly, strove to take up the thread of the table-talk which was led by Miss Prue and was chiefly scriptural, according to that lady's idea of what was due to the Sabbath morn. He noted that she did not dwell on the state of the country, but

once when Neville inadvertently touched upon the subject, the shudder which convulsed Irene's frame and the sudden look that shadowed the older woman's face showed the nearness of its presence in their thoughts. Nevertheless, the meal was a pleasant one, despite the sense of constraint, and the soldier himself prolonged it, so sensible was he of the charm of the peaceful view from the windows over the sweet May land where Sunday bells were chiming.

"By the way, who is this Gash?" he asked his host as an hour later they paced up and down before the door while Mat and Jerry were harnessing the solid mare which had carried him thither, a proceeding in which she displayed much interest, turning her winkered head from side to side as if more fully to inspect the magnificent equipage she was destined to draw to a neighbouring church.

"It is not easy to answer that question," replied Neville, "I know little about him beyond the fact that he is something in the secretary way in the House. He is a distant relative of the Luttrells, and they have great influence with the Executive. Now, as an instance, that cousin of mine you know, who got into trouble" —he sank his voice—"over the arrest of the Leinster delegates. Well, he was sentenced to transportation to New Guinea egad, I told Gash, he got a stay of proceeding just in the nick of time, and we'll have a strong case for compensation, though the rogues sent him on to New Ross so that he might be wearied out of taking proceedings for false imprisonment."

"I do not understand," said the soldier.

"No," rejoined Neville simply, "you are an Englishman."

They walked up and down in silence for a little while. "By the way," resumed Neville, "he's tooth and nail for a union with ye!"

"Is he?" answered Heathcote. "I am not a bookish

man, sir, but I recollect reading that an Englishman once said of those same Union projects—'Do not make a union with us; we should unite with you only to rob you. We should have robbed the Scotch if they had anything of which we could have robbed them.'"

"Egad!" cried Neville, "that's right good! Say it again."

Heathcote did so. The old man stopped and looked at him. "You were out early this morning, Ralph?" he said. "Have you rested well?"

"I made a reconnaissance," replied the soldier dryly.

"Ah, and you intend making a report?"

"It will probably furnish forth matter for one," rejoined the soldier. "I was at the Hermitage." And he related what had occurred.

"By Heaven, the rascal should be court-martialled," exclaimed Neville. "Like as not, he's some scullion's bastard from a Cork doorstep, they give commissions to that sort of men now. You can't fight him of course?"

"I can have the epaulets torn off his shoulders," replied Heathcote laughing contemptuously, "and I shall have it done as sure as His Majesty is King of England. That is why I am going to Enniscorthy to-day."

Neville put his hands behind his back, and shook his head doubtfully. "After all," he said, "I think it would be better to call him out—he's colonel, or captain, or something—and shoot him; you could wing the other dogs. I do not think you will get much satisfaction by complaining."

"Why not?"

"Because Gash tells me—now this in confidence—that it is not unlikely they intercept your reports and so on. He says they are not fools over here."

Heathcote stopped dead. He thought of the stolen

memoranda. "Who are *they*?" he asked, controlling his voice.

"'Od's life, I suppose the Executive, they seem to do what they like—it's a cursed country, Heathcote. Well, well, here is the chaise at last, and there's your horse. God bless you, lad! Ah, Irene, so you cannot persuade Ralph to remain longer with us? Those soldiers! They adore the sex, but their real mistress is duty."

"And a very exacting mistress too," laughed Heathcote, now in the saddle. "But I shall be here I hope this evening, on my way to Wexford, so with your permission, sir, I shall not say good-bye, but *au revoir*."

He waved his hand to the old man, and glanced at the spires and gables of the old house amid the pleasant grounds in all their May-tide bravery.

"You are not coming with us—Walter?" observed Miss Prudence, with that thinly veiled attempt at quiet coercion which church-going ladies often bring to bear upon their men-folk in the presence of strangers.

"Well, no, Prue," replied Neville, "I have letters to write. Besides, think how terrible it would be if the united army of United Irishmen attacked the place, and kissed the maids! Would you ever forgive yourself for leaving it ungarrisoned?"

Here Jerry whose ear had caught the bang of the carriage door, moved off, and the party trotted away, leaving the old man standing at the door.

They soon swept out upon the level dust-powdered road, and Heathcote eager to obviate any sense of pique the ladies might have felt from his constrained manner at breakfast, rode by the window, striving to entertain them. Irene spoke little, but watched his face musingly. He thought the vanished girlishness of her face had but added a new beauty. He noted too that she glanced over the empty fields wistfully, and that once when passing a roofless, smouldering hut her limpid eyes filled. On reaching the little church where

Mr Poppepper officiated she beckoned him to her ere she alighted. "Ralph," she said, "do you believe there will be war?"

"I should think ill of their manhood if there were not," he answered bluntly.

She looked into his eyes. "Will you," she said softly, "promise me, upon your honour, to protect to the best of your ability any woman who may fall into your hands—for the sake of your little playmate in the time that is gone for ever?"

"I am an officer in the King's forces," said Heathcote coldly.

She opened her lips, but controlling herself, smiled.

"Will there be fighting?" asked Miss Prue. "Here I mean?"

"I cannot tell, but I am sure that you and the Rose of Coolmore have nothing to fear."

Irene left the coach. "Tell me," she said, looking up into his face, "if a man who was a rebel laid down his arms, could he get safe conduct out of the country? I understand that some gentlemen who have been implicated in the Carlow affair will be allowed to do so?"

"He could get safe-conduct," said Heathcote dryly.

"But, if he were an officer in another service, a French officer?"

"Oh fie, Irene, talking of French officers when you have an English one beside you!" cried a vibrant, sprightly voice at her elbow, and Mrs Gore who had just alighted, shook hands with Miss Prue.

"Fan," she continued, "here's Irene, now keep the remainder of your Vauxhall adventures until we leave the church. Shall we have the pleasure of your company, Major Heathcote?"

"I fear that I cannot have the honour of attending you," replied Heathcote, "I am *en route* for Enniscorthy."

"Going so soon? Fie, fie, the ladies adore you—though that helmet is most affrighting — Oh, a little

bird told me! Nay, Irene, why blush? Ah, here is Mr Gash. Good morning, Mr Gash, will you not come in and hear Mr Poppepper just to show your friendship?"

"Ami jusqu' aux autels," laughed Gash, pulling up his horse, with a courteous smile to Miss Prue, and a bow to the soldier. "Duty compels me as it doubtless does Major Heathcote, to pass on, but I am Papish enough to beg your prayers."

"Oh shame," twittered Mrs Gore, "there is no good Papist, save a dead one!" And laughing, the ladies went into the church.

"Where to?" asked Gash, wheeling his steed, a fine bay, in a picturesque demi-circle to avoid an approaching carriage.

"To Enniscorthy," said Heathcote, touching the mare with a heel and going forward.

"Oh indeed. I understand there has been some fighting," remarked Gash, "a collision I am told between some rebels coming to surrender their pikes and a body of horse yesterday, at a place called the Harrow."

"How many slaughtered?" Heathcote asked.

"Why, not one," said Mr Gash, kissing a sparkling hand to Mrs Ogle, "one Morphy or Murphy, a priest, rode up, and egad the men drew off. Fine woman, Mrs Ogle?

"Ah, gra-ma-chree, ma colleen oge,
My Molly astore."

Heathcote saluted in response to the lady's bow. He saw that Mr Gash was in high spirits, and noted also that he carried a cloak strapped upon the horse's crupper.

"Well, farewell. Shall I see you at dinner to-night at Malplaquet?" continued that worthy.

"We shall probably meet again," replied Heathcote gravely, "I have business here this evening."

"Pleasant business?" remarked Mr Gash showing his teeth.

"Devilish unpleasant for those with whom I shall have to transact it," retorted the soldier. "By the way, do you know one Harrigan?"

A change flitted over Mr Gash's suave face, the soldier's eye caught his a moment ere it slipped away to the smiling countryside. "I do," he answered, stifling a yawn. "He wanted to take service with me, but I could not afford it; he has a sort of good character I believe and might prove a useful rogue, though possibly light-fingered."

Heathcote smiled grimly, but before he could reply a strange thing happened upon that silent road with its fringe of silent dwellings. The little church, too large for its shrunken congregation, stood opposite an angle shaded by fragrant chestnuts, and round this corner, at a gallop, came at least a dozen horsemen in various uniforms led by an officer in blue. They appeared so suddenly that Heathcote's sword flashed from its sheath only as the leader came abreast of the church. He was evereux.

"Spy!" he shouted to Gash. "Spy!" yelled the others, and they were gone at the word, their horse hoofs pounding dully on the dusty road.

Gash wheeled aside with a low, hissing curse, his eyes aflame, his nostrils dilated. "Devereux!" he shouted. "Did you not see him? Hell, if I had only known!" His pistol was drawn now, a moment later he replaced it.

"Yeomen?" said Heathcote.

"Deserters!" cried Gash. "I tell you this means something. Three or four were in Le Hunt's uniform, the rest were Wexfords. Whither can they be bound? By G—d, Heathcote, you may find the road to Enniscorthy blocked."

"It is hardly likely," replied the other coolly, "if they are deserters they are making for some rendezvous and will be quite willing to avoid observation until their numbers increase. Farewell."

CHAPTER XI

THE fretting horses were released and the two men went their separate ways, each busy with his own train of thought, the soldier dully spelling his way to the solution of the problem which had presented itself to him frequently that morning, the spy pondering with set lips on the sudden question—"Do you know one Harrigan?"

"Curse him," he muttered, going at a somewhat slower pace because of the heat, "can he suspect anything, the oyster-pated fool? Could Harrigan be playing fast and loose? That hundred I held over in the Fitzgerald business may have decided him; luckily I can twist the rope on his neck any time. Patience, patience, cool brain and steady hand against the world."

He rode on, smiling to himself now and then, but with a sharp eye for every clump of bushes on the wayside, and a tightening of the heart of every space of fence-bordered highway. "Zounds!" he muttered, "what things we are! Here am I planning and plotting, for what—God knows, perhaps a quiet fireside and fine death sheets at the end, and yet at the mercy of a slug fired by a tatterdemalion from behind a hedge. Pah, I think sometimes it is great cry and little wool."

It occurred to him that it might mean something more as the gables of Malplaquet House came in view, and he paused a moment by the laurel-bordered approach, debating with himself whether he would go in or not. "No," he said finally, shaking his head, "better let my pupil alone. 'Slife, how easily those high and mighty ones take to rascality! Egad, I daresay ten years ago I could not hope for a seat at his table, and here I am to-day, the

broker who negotiates his treason. Ah, Irene, Irene! Well, time shall tell. Egad, it would not be a bad ending, the mortgage paid off and the old man dead—Mr Luttrell Gash, J.P., of Malplaquet House, 'twould look well, or perhaps Sir Philip, better still! But, oh the blood and tears that lie between!"

He moved on, regarding the countryside silent under the white sunlight. "Bah," he continued, knitting his brows at the desolated land, "let them wince, the superstitious dogs! Yesterday they stoned the French from Bantry Bay, to-day they shun the United Irishmen and give up their pikes at the word of a priest. Let's see what it will do for them." And hardening his heart, he rode past the groves Neville's spasmodic industry had planted a few years before, until he saw once again the swift-flowing Slaney.

As he topped some rising ground a peculiar spectacle caught his attention. Far away across the river he saw a distant column of black smoke shoot up into the summer haze, then another, and yet another some little distance further on. "That must be the Oulart road," he murmured, rising in his stirrups, "burning huts I daresay."

A shadow fell at his horse's feet, he put his hand on a holster and looked round, then he smiled. "Ah, Harrigan," he cried, "there you are, up to time as usual."

"Aye," answered the spy, who had just got over a neighbouring fence, "and to snuff too."

"A man would want to be in those times, by Gad," said Gash, offering his box. "Anything new about our friend the writing Major?"

"Plenty," laughed Harrigan, "do you know where he spent last night?"

"At Malplaquet House?"

"No, at the Hermitage!"

"Then we may expect some charming compositions over this."

"By my soul you may, for he was there as a prisoner."

Gash wheeled his horse round and looked at the other, a grin showing his teeth. "You lie!" he cried.

"Damn the lie!" roared the spy. "They were going to pitch-cap him?" And he spun round, smiting his knee in the ecstasy of his mirth. "Plornish did not know him of course, or was too drunk to care, and the others were as bad—Oh, it is too good!"

Gash laughed heartily with uplifted eyebrows. "He'll get them court-martialled as sure as fate," he said, "we'll have wigs on the green. But, had he his uniform—they must have been mad drunk?"

"He had not, he was in civilian dress and pumps, damn me, and he couldn't prove his identity, because his pocket-book was stolen." The spy stamped here in the transport of his amusement. "His private memoranda stolen by a rascally foot-pad, sink me!"

Gash looked down at him more closely now, a growing light in his keen eye that shone under the half-closed lid. "Harrigan, you'll be hanged" he said slowly.

"And if I am," cried the other, straightening his back, "you'll dance the same dance in my company—if the receiver be as bad as the thief." And he pulled from his pocket the book which had been taken from Heathcote the evening before. Gash snatched at it with a sudden avidity, but the spy stepped backward, holding it aloft.

"No, damn me," he swore, "the workman is worthy of his wage—eh, Mr Gash? I am not an over-keen tool, but I am not to be choused any longer; when am I to get the balance of the four hundred coming to me out of the Fitzgerald arrest?"

Gash's face whitened; he glanced over his shoulder.

"There's no one listening," said the other roughly, "or if there is, it hardly matters now. Curse me, is it because a man does not wear a good coat and a ring and carry it off among the *bona robas* that he is to fawn and cringe for his hard-earned cash? Aye, earned by more risk than the soldier takes in battle! There's Newell, there's Tom

Reynolds—but he's a top-sawyer, he'll get his thousands —there's you, with your fine gentleman airs, you can go about among the quality and rook them at cards, and drink their wine, and probably you will, after marrying one of their daughters, die a baronet. But here's poor Steve Harrigan, pardoned highwayman, deserter, traitor, apostate—he must be content with 'Thankye, Steve; here's a groat, and don't make a beast of yourself.' So, lookye, Mr Gash, if I'm good enough to use, I am good enough to pay!"

Gash tapped his teeth with the handle of his riding whip, his eye was murderous now, but the red gleam in the other's fully matched it.

"You'd make a devilish good actor, near as good as Macklin," he said.

"I *am* a devilish good actor," replied Harrigan, "else I should not be able to keep an ounce of lead out of my skull amongst those plotting yahoos."

"Well, how much do you want?"

"Make it seventy, and I won't say anything about the hanging gale, ha, ha!"

"But this may be worth nothing?"

"Indeed? Is the memoranda of certain court-martials relative to the discipline of yeomen officers nothing? Is it worth nothing to know what Major Heathcote thinks of them and of their men? Is it worth nothing to see the report of certain opinions expressed by one Mr Gash?"

"Do you think I am a walking bank?"

"Ecod, you are better security than many a one."

"I wish that were true; all my fortune is represented by a few tickets in a cursed risky lottery."

"Oh, there is not much risk after all—it is a Government one. Come, fork out the crusadoes. It's well worth it, for damn the leaf you'll get otherwise; I'd rather give it back to him!"

Mr Gash slowly produced a pocket-book and counted

out several notes; the spy took and examined them minutely, and then handed Gash the little book, and patting the horse's neck at intervals, told how he had gained it. "'Twas the merest chance," he went on; "the rebels must have got at the horse and taken her for the army, morrayah—met him on the road looking for her, and questioned him. He's a game bird anyway, for I heard it all, being with the riflemen, and when they let him go I saw such a chance was not to be lost, so tipped the wink to a couple of friends, put on our masks, and were after him. They got the ticker, some guineas, and one of them a broken face; I was content with the book—was it not lucky?"

"Miraculous!" assented Mr Gash between his teeth, as he turned a leaf; "egad, there are things here would give some people's neck a crick in 'em if they reached England, but it will keep. How did he get from the Hermitage?"

Harrigan's eye darkened. "By some clap-trap stair, or something of that kind. It's an owlish place."

"Did Heathcote know you—that would be awkward?"

"Not at all, I kept out of his way, once I made sure of him, Friday evening. He got off with Kitty Creagh—she must have heard, but no matter, I can fight my way through a worse place."

"Kitty is not dangerous?"

"Oho! I near forgot; only last night at exercise I found she has been fooling ye all along, fooling Plornish and the rest. She was a counter spy for the United Irishmen and has been harbouring Devereux and others at various times at Taghmon, the man told me so himself after reading your essay in penmanship—'twas a pity you did not nab him, I thought I said—'Rourk's Field at twelve,' as we passed that time?"

"Yes, yes, but who'd have thought he'd have gone to Malplaquet, where he must have known we were all to dinner. What could he have wanted there?"

Harrigan gave him a long bantering look, two ugly spots of red showed suddenly on Gash's cheek bones, there came a cruel sparkle beneath the shadowed eyes; the spy pulled out a dirty silk pocket-handkerchief and began to dust his boots, humming the while—

> "Oh! who but an owl would a garland entwine
> Of Bacchus's ivy—and myrtle resign?
> Yield the odours of love for the vapours of wine,
> And Chloe's kind kiss for a bottle!"

"Aye, who indeed?" he resumed, pulling up his stock, "but the devil of it is we generally try to combine the two, with very disastrous results, and unfortunately as there is a bottle everywhere, and a girl not far off to uncork it—why, we get every opportunity."

"Experto crede?" grinned Gash.

"Aye—experto crede, my buck," retorted the other drawing his level brows together, his face darkening as he looked across the emerald plain.

"Well, it will be easy to charm her tongue," observed Mr Gash.

"Pshaw, the mischief is done now. With Heathcote she might be dangerous, but then, there is the harbouring of Devereux—it's a pretty tangle, but egad the sword may cut it. Do you know what that is yonder?" Harrigan pointed to the pillars of smoke rising along the horizon.

"Burning houses?"

"Aye, it's the column under Foote marching to a place called Oulart Hill, near Enniscorthy, there's a mort of rebels there."

"There was some fighting at the Harrow?"

"That's nothing, last night the Camolins and poor Bookey were cut to pieces by an ambuscade."

"Good God! Why, he was dining at Malplaquet House the other evening."

"That does not prevent worms from dining on him now.

We heard all about it this morning when an express came from Wexford to call in the cavalry from the Hermitage."

"Then, the hour has struck at last!"

Bang! There was a flash and a spirtle of smoke curving upward into the quiet air above the fence Harrigan had climbed. Harrigan's cheek had a welt on it, and the top of Gash's riding whip was grazed. A sound of crashing boughs amid the underwood followed.

Before the globe of smoke had dissolved Harrigan had spun round, dashed to the fence and fired. Gash wheeled his horse, and rising in the stirrups, craned his neck forward ere he put the animal to the jump; then he began to laugh. "Winged!" he cried, "he's down!"

"Where?" shouted the spy, who had reloaded with incredible rapidity.

Gash pointed to a spot in the straggling undergrowth, Harrigan plunged into the thicket, there were two reports, a smothered cry and an oath; the spy came pushing his way back, his face white.

"Dead?" said Gash.

Harrigan made a contemptuous gesture and began to bind the handkerchief about his wrist.

"Do you know him?" asked Gash.

"Yes, curse it!" replied the other, "it's one of the Saxons. I'd better go back to the Hermitage. Well, it should come some time, but it came very close."

Gash laughed. "It is the risk all loyal men take those times," he said. "Come on, then, I wish to see Plornish, there is a rascal yeoman in his troop who is accused of harbouring Lord Edward when he was in Cork; there's another matter too."

They turned back and then paused, Gash peering forward over his horse's ears. A dull red spot came upon the white ribbon of road before them, the spot grew into a blurr of horsemen advancing at a quick trot, the flash and sparkle of brass showed they were soldiers.

"Yeomen," said Gash, "I saw some this morning, led by Devereux."

"Faith, these ain't," laughed the spy, "that middle one's Plornish, don't you see how he rolls in the saddle? He's a damned bad rider, like a damned bad everything else. Where can they be going?"

They soon knew, for the horsemen had drawn their swords and broken into a gallop, keeping very well together, and glancing over their shoulders. Gash raised his hat, they pulled up laughing.

"In the King's name!" shouted Plornish.

"God save the King," replied Gash with a theatrical flourish of his chapeau. "Good morning, gentlemen, morning, Trimmins."

"Soh, friends," said Plornish who had brought his horse to a walk, "there has been firing, we came on when we heard the shots."

"Yes," replied Gash, "we were talking of the affairs of the nation when some sneaking croppy thought it a good opportunity for a shot at us."

"Where is he? How coolly you take it! There may be a company of 'em behind the ditch?" cried the man of war with many oaths.

"There is only one," drawled Harrigan rubbing the flint of his pistol, "and as the player fellow says, 'he'll stay till you come.' I do not always miss my aim, Mr Plornish. There is a guard at the Hermitage?"

"Yes, are you returning?"

"Certainly, the weather threatens to become too sultry on this road."

"Which, long as it is, has a turning," laughed Gash.

"Devil a lie in that," rejoined Harrigan, "so it's well to have the price of the 'pike' in our pockets."

"By G—d you are right," swore Plornish who was now perfectly sober, and held himself with a kind of bastard manliness, an illusion heightened by his uniform and the anxious look which made his mean face almost tragic.

"Have you heard about it, Gash, the Camolins cut to pieces, the whole country is up. Turner of Newfort brought the news this morning to Wexford, and nearly all my men were applied for. God! I did not think the croppies had it in them. Doctor Burrows of Kyle was murdered too and seven parishioners who had got into the place for protection, Bookey's house at Rockspring was burned, but two fellows holding it made a pretty fight and got off. The rebels are now it seems encamped in battle array on Oulart Hill, t'other side of Enniscorthy, and Foote with the North Cork are on their trail with plenty of cavalry—my men and Boyd's, and Jacob's and Le Hunt's also. See, one can trace their line of march by the smoke from the damned croppies' burrows which they burn as they go!"

"Well, good luck to them!" laughed Gash. "By the way, I wanted to see you."

"I am going to Malplaquet House," replied the yeoman, "come with me as you are known there. Here, Trimmins, you need not come any farther. Mr Gash, Lieutenant Harrison and myself, can fight our own way now. Go back with Harrigan, keep in the middle of the road, and shoot at anything you see moving behind the bushes."

The corporal saluting, wheeled round, and Harrigan with a quick nod, stepped forward by the horse's side, a pistol in his hand, for like the soldier of Lucullus, he found real estate a sad drawback on military enterprise.

"Well, what do you want to see me about?" asked Plornish anxiously.

"Oh, a small matter," replied the other, switching the dust from his boots, "you sentenced one O'Daly to New Guinea the other day at Wexford, did you not?"

"Yes, he was deported from the town."

"Aye, but managed to get a stay of warrant for further inquiries at Waterford, and it seems he is now at New Ross, talking about legal proceedings."

"Well—can't they send him to Dublin by Galway, and so wear him out? Is this a time for lawyers?"

"Lord Castlereagh appears to think it is," replied Mr Gash quietly, "besides, he is a relative of Mr Neville—a cousin, or something of that sort."

"Gad's life! Why did you not say that before, Gash?" I have a great respect for Mr Neville. I did not call upon him yet—I shall be glad if you will present me. Ah—a Major Heathcote of the Ninth Dragoons is staying there I believe?"

"Yes, but he has gone to Enniscorthy to-day, I met him just now on the road in a very bad humour indeed," replied Mr Gash demurely.

Plornish stopped dead. "Curse me, that's too bad," he cried, "I wanted to see him."

"Oh, he returns this evening," observed Gash, stifling a smile. "Yes, yes, in fact there has been a mistake," the other continued, "he stopped some of my men last night—wanted 'em to find a horse for him. Well, as they did not like to break escort, they asked him fair and easy to come on to the station and report. He did, and when he got there his behaviour was outrageous. I was looking through the order book when he came in, and I says a few simple questions to him. He up with his foot and gave me a kick in the pit of the stomach for answer! And to hear his language—Irish dogs was the best term for us."

"Oh, yes, by G—d he used us shameful," grinned Harrison, I wouldn't take such treatment from my father, curse me!"

"Look here, says I a bit nettled," continued Plornish, "if you are Major Heathcote, where is your uniform? Where is your commission? What are you doing with that pike?—he had a pike as long as to-day and to-morrow in his fist—I am robbed of 'em says he, you Irish dog, and if I had 'em I wouldn't show 'em to you. Well, what could I do and the men listening? I had him

escorted up to an ante-room—of course I couldn't put him under arrest, for he was drunk, I must say that. And what does he do but get out through the window, take a case of pistols value three pounds, a horse, saddle and furniture and ride off with a woman—not the best of characters either—I had under observation. Now, what do you say to that?"

"That you are a liar," replied Mr Gash pleasantly, "if I were in your place I should make things comfortable for Mr O'Daly. Attempting to pitch-cap a King's officer is rather dangerous."

"Well—what am I to do?" asked Plornish, his mouth drooping.

"Why, sign a statement that upon subsequent inquiry you are convinced of the gentleman's innocence and that you came on to New Ross, learning he was there. Then, Mr Neville may do something to smoothe over the insult to Major Heathcote. If not—ah, what is that?"

He checked his horse as he spoke, seeing a little group of ash trees springing in a neighbouring brae violently agitated, the others reined up, Plornish with a pistol drawn.

"This to find!" he cried, and fired.

There was a scream from the underwood, Harrison recognising a woman in the cry levelled instantly.

"Don't fire!" cried Gash, "don't you see it is only a woman?"

Then took place a scene so pitiable that it might have moved a heart of stone. Slowly a woman's face showed above the brambles, so pinched, so gaunt, that it might have served as a model for Holbein's "Death," her thin, naked arms extended, the swollen joints and shrunken flesh testifying awful things in their emaciation. Behind her crowded some seven or eight little starving children, like herself almost garmentless, peeping out elfin-like from under the feathery foliage of the underwood, and the uncoiling green of the delicate fern fronds where they had

been crouching when the yeoman's bullet found them as the driblet of blood on one little cheek showed. The dazed mother stood there with extended arms, opening and shutting her blue-rimmed mouth whence no sound issued, praying for but life in life's extremest misery.

Touched by a pity he had no right to feel, Gash took from his pocket a guinea and tossed it across the road, one of the children saw and flung herself upon the glistening thing, the yellow hair tumbling about her hollow temples.

"Ecod, I think a bullet would be kinder?" said Plornish.

"Yes, kill the nits ere they become lice, as General Cromwell has it," said Harrison solemnly.

"Possibly you are right," replied Gash looking almost a gentleman by virtue of the light in his eye, "but you would have to shoot the litter, and you may want your ammunition for other purposes: so keep your powder dry."

Plornish laughed somewhat unsteadily. "It may be very deep policy on your part, Gash, but curse me if it doesn't look crack-brained to set us and the rest to hunt down these vermin, and then when we have driven them from their burrows—throw 'em gold. Sink me, it's like breaking crown-glass with guineas as the fellow said."

Mr Gash smiled. "Do not deny me humanity's dearest prerogative inconsistency," he said. "In any case, you shall not be offended by a like manifestation again. Now for New Ross."

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Neville returned to the room he called his study, he pulled out some notepaper, and choosing a quill, began to write carefully like a man who has much to say, but is not sure of the best way of saying it.

"My Lord," the letter commenced, "I understand from Mr Gash that you have the design of improving the town of New Ross by building a dockyard there, and that you would be willing to purchase my place near the Friary Gardens. I am, as you are well aware, no favourer of your policy, or at least Mr Pitt's, but recent events have decided me on giving that policy a trial on general principles. I am the more readily induced to come to this decision by reflections on the present state of the country, and by the knowledge of my own powerlessness to effect any amelioration in the present posture of affairs, reflections which have induced me to contemplate applying for the Escheatorship of Leinster at the first available opportunity. My price for the land near the gardens, which I need hardly assure your Lordship is admirably situated for docking, is ten thousand pounds, a sum which may be paid in instalments, should you think the project worth the expenditure.—I have the honour, etc."

He had copied this with many alterations for the third time, and was affixing his signature, glorified by foolish flourishes, when the door opened softly, and Irene looked in. The click of the lock roused her father.

"Why, Irene," he cried, laying down the pen, "how pale you are! What's the matter, child?"

She came to his side quickly, first closing the door. "I knocked once or twice, but you did not hear," she

said. "I wanted to speak about —— Do I interrupt you?"

"No, no," replied Neville, pushing the paper aside, "but time flies so when one is engaged, as old Dante says. I was writing a letter to a great personage—one has to be careful of one's 'P's' and 'Q's', and somehow words don't come as readily as they used."

Irene drew a stool close to her father, and rested her head against his breast. He patted it, a little uneasily. "Well, what is it?" he asked kindly. She did not reply immediately; she was weeping.

"'Od's life, Irene, girl," he said, catching her face between his hands, "don't do that, sorrow is almost a sin in a young maid—tears should be left to age—and—and —people who have occasion for them. Come, what happened?"

"Oh, father," she sobbed, "when will this end—this hanging and torturing? The people could talk of nothing else at church to-day. There has been awful cruelty at Carlow and Carnew—butchery, not fighting; and oh, to-morrow it may be here! On the way back we could see nothing but empty cabins—all along the road up to the very house. It was not so last Sunday. Where are the rebels? Where are the women and children? What does it all mean?"

"Well, I don't exactly know," replied Neville; "it's a question of policy," he went on, relieved because she was grieving only "on general principles"; "the Government thinks it needful to make examples."

"Can you do nothing?"

"Well, no, Irene dear. I was just—ah—writing a letter to Lord Castlereagh—he's a great man, very influential, very clever and so forth. I have been thinking that I might as well as quit the stage, and let others do the work—quit the stage before I'm pushed off, as the poet says, egad. Now, there is a plan of a letter," he continued, indicating the note yet lying on the desk

before them, "you will see from it that maybe things are not as bad as they are painted."

She read the letter and looked at him. She had risen to take it, but did not immediately resume her seat at his side.

"Is our place at the Friary worth so much?" she said quietly. "You said last year you would sell it gladly for three thousand pounds; why is it worth ten thousand now?"

"Ah, you see property is very uncertain in Ireland, Irene darling," replied her father, passing his hand across his forehead. "You see it fluctuates—there's a law, the law of supply and demand—but I assure you it is worth every penny of the sum now, under the circumstances."

"Oh—under the circumstances?" said Irene slowly.

Neville drummed with his fingers on the table. "It's business, Irene dear," he answered, and something whispered that it was dirty business, but he put the thought away.

"Father," said Irene, "was not Lord Castlereagh once plain Robert Stewart? Did he not hold the opinions you now hold?"

"What's the use of talking about that?" replied Neville pettishly. "'Od's life, people change."

"But right and wrong do not change," answered Irene. "No good work was ever done by the methods now employed. We live in a fool's paradise which may tumble about our ears at any moment."

"But what can I do?" cried Neville, weakly arguing with the unspoken thought. "I am useless; they'll carry this cursed Union—there will be no other alternative for the country. I did not see it so clearly all along as I do now. A fixed plan has been followed ever since '83, when the Bill to extend the franchise to £20 tenants, open decayed boroughs, and compel holders like myself to swear that they had not bought their seats, was defeated —it struck at two-thirds of us, girl, and we had not the

honesty to make it law and sacrifice our own petty interests and privileges. That broke the political power of the Volunteers. Then, I recollect how Grattan failed to have an inquiry into the alleged expenses of collecting the revenue swollen to enormous dimensions. Those very expenses covered pensions to Government tools whose names could not appear on the ordinary list without creating comment. Then came the Titles and Peerages business—sure they wanted to make me Baron Coolmore, or what was it?"

"I recollect," said the girl, "I was very sorry at the time—it would have been so grand, but I am not sorry now."

He looked keenly at her; she returned the look, with interest.

"Well," he resumed, "I did my best, struggled against this damnable business like Ogle and the rest, but to what purpose? Didn't I go up to Dublin at great inconvenience a few years ago when Curran was defending Hamilton Rowan for doing what he had a right to do as a citizen in a free country, because—say what they will—" he added sinking his voice, "the United Irishmen are the Volunteers under another name. Well, where's Curran now? Out of the mess. Ah God, I'm sick of politics. What can an honest man who is not a rebel get but the hate of both parties? Look at Grattan! There he is now, out of the country, cursed by everybody. And yet, he told me in that dining-room downstairs, that Pitt was honest. He may be. I know myself, Irene, what he did for our trade. Isn't Blood a walking, or egad, a staggering testimony of what we gained by our trade with the West Indies alone. Now, Gash who certainly is a sharp blade and wishes us well, says Castlereagh is honest. He may be so, I'll give him the benefit of the doubt—they are all honest men—and the country is going to the devil between them."

"And, father," said his daughter slowly, "so this is the

upshot of it all—the revolution of '82 only raised the price of the borough holders?"

"Who told you that? Where did you read it?" he asked harshly, drawing her face away from his shoulder where she had put it again, "Talk of that kind is very dangerous when people are powerless."

"You say you are powerless," replied Irene softly, though her colour was high, "you surely are able still to keep your name unstained, as you have kept it so long, and die as you have lived, a clean-handed gentleman."

He caught her to him silently, and they remained some minutes in that close embrace, the useless tears running down the old man's face.

"I must think of you, child, now," he went on after a while, "it is due to you, your mother, God bless her—the Rose—brought me many a broad acre round about here —where are they now?"

"Did I ever ask?"

"Dear God, no—but that makes it worse. Do you remember those elms by the boundary wall I cut down last spring? And those in the plantations? Their price went to pay the interest accruing on my debts and keep things going. Then, there's the mortgage, it's not pleasant to talk of those things, pet, but egad they are true, that's I suppose why they are unpleasant. I have not been a bad man, child, but I have been a fool, and it seems as if it is worse, in this world at all events, to be foolish than to be wicked. Do not mind thinking about the country, it is past mending; think of ourselves, if we let this chance go we may not get another, and at any rate, we shall not have to answer for this blackguardism."

"Oh, father," she whispered, "I fear we shall, if not here, hereafter."

"Pshaw, God help us," said Neville impatiently, "hereafter is a long word, we'll put it on the long finger."

"But if we are not afraid of God we must be afraid of

men, and the reckoning may come sooner than we look for. Listen!"

She knelt beside him, and putting her mouth to his ear, spoke of the things she had seen in the little cabin by the quarry; he set his brows and put his hand to her lips. "My poor little girl," he said, "what could Heathcote have been thinking of?"

"Of me," replied Irene, without a trace of coquetry in the tone, "he cared nothing for those poor people, he is as heartless as the rest—only he is a gentleman."

"Yes, he is, kind father for him," said Neville, "it's a fine thing to be a gentleman—when one can afford it—but otherwise, one must go with the crowd."

"Even if the way lies to eternal shame? Oh, father, no, no, life is so very short——"

"It's cursed long for those who haven't the rhino," muttered Neville.

"And our acts live on and on and there is no room for a mistake," continued Irene, unheeding. "Oh, believe me I would rather die in a ditch, poor, friendless, alone, than link our name to scorn. And so would you, if it were not for me. Believe me I would rather thus die than live in any splendour purchased by the—the——"

She broke down and lay sobbing on his neck, and so they remained until summoned from the room by the announcement that the Gores had come to dinner.

The party was, if possible, gayer than any Malplaquet had ever seen in its days of revelry, Blood, Bird, Smith, who was on a visit with the Gores, Calton who should have been at Camolin, all came on one reason or another, and with them some squires of the neighbourhood of a type which endures to the present day and is not worth description. Nellie Bird, a small elegantly dressed lady, more like a Frenchwoman of the perished regime who had come to Wexford through Dublin, than the rose she was of a thorny Cromwellian stock, divided with Irene the honours of the party, though closely rivalled by Mrs Gibbs

and her daughters. Amongst the other ladies were the two Miss Gowans, daughters of a very active loyalist, foolish Mrs Freeman, serious Mrs Poppepper and sparkling Fanny Gore, a dazzling brunette hilariously recounting how some officers in Dublin ruffled her petticoats to find whether she wore green garters! An adventure which Smith capped by the amusing anecdote of an officer of his own corps who discovering green ribbons on two young women who had used a rebelly phrase as he passed, had them tied back to back and kept thus in the streets under a guard for some hours.

When the following laughter had died away Calton covered himself with glory by relating the facetious behaviour of one Crothers, trumpeter in the Ninth Dragoons, who at Gorey got up a papistical procession and paraded the streets, an idolatrous stole round his neck, and on the point of his sword a crucifix, shouting as he went—"Behold the wooden Jesus, behold the God of the Papists!"

At this juncture Mr Gash, Plornish, Harrison and the liberated O'Daly were announced, an unlooked-for event which still further increased the sprightliness of the party whose riotous spirits grew with every fresh glass of noble claret that had known the days of Pompadour and of Dubarri.

O'Daly, a small man with a perpetually astonished air, his scanty grey locks brushed over his scalp in lieu of a wig, looked extremely surprised at finding himself the hero of the occasion, and got promptly drunk, subsequently delivering a speech of Grattan's on toleration, from the table where he stood swaying among the equipage, a guest holding each ankle, until losing his balance he slipped underneath and out of the memory of the company.

On returning to the drawing-room dancing was indulged in, and presently romping of an extremely vigorous description. It was a time when such vivacities were fashionable,

the excuse being that it did away with undue formality, and certainly there was no society in the world where a formal carriage would be more out of place; its members having become blackguards, had at least the wit to see the incongruity of any pretensions to the good breeding whose basis must always be self-respect.

A sheet was procured, spread on the stairs, and upon it the ladies seated themselves, rising tier on tier, a multi-coloured mass of wanton gaiety; then, the gentlemen taking hold thereof, pulled it down to the hall amid an indescribable medley of shrieks, laughter, screams and exclamations which might be described by a sympathiser as naïve, the damsels displaying a most immodest modesty, the cavaliers coming out, each in his true character, while wondering if it really were his own house, Neville looked on his daughter sent flying into the ready arms of Blood, more than half drunk, and kissed by that gentleman with much elaboration of detail. "Damn me," he thought, "so they see now I'm one of themselves, and that my daughter may be handled like a drab!"

But the climax was reached when Plornish who had snatched Irene from Blood, kissed her too, pressing his splotched visage against her flushed face, and then as she pushed him away, dropped something into the bosom of her low-cut bodice, something which made her start back, tearing frantically at the light muslin ere she fell fainting beside the awful thing she plucked forth—a human finger!

There was the sound of a blow followed by a crash, and Plornish reeled backward smitten by Gash, a girl's voice, the voice of Fanny Gore, cried "Well done!"

"I am beholden to you, sir," said Neville, gathering his daughter into his arms, "I shall have one of the servants bring you water and a soap-ball to wash your hands with in the ante-room."

"What's this?" gasped Plornish, staggering to his feet. "Do you know who I am?"

"No," replied Mr Gash, "any more than you know who your father is."

"You damned spy—you carrow!" spluttered the yeoman, bringing his fist down upon a marble consol near, "do you know who you are?"

"Yes," said Mr Gash, suavely, "a gentleman." And truly there was some excuse just then for the magnificent lie.

"Confound it, Gash," how dare you strike a King's officer?" cried Harrison, seeing the others set up a laugh.

Mr Gash's face was not a very handsome one, but it could on occasion take a kind of fleeting dignity, and it is not too much to say that the questioner shrank back from the cold contempt of his eye, as he looked a scorn no words could make more incisive and left the room.

Neville had taken Irene to the study, attended by Phyllis, where they found Miss Prudence, whose gown had been torn in the riot, and here Mr Gash followed them. The girl lay lifeless on a lounge, her father knelt by, chafing her little hands.

"Mr Neville," he said, "God knows no man can more bitterly regret than I do the unspeakable insult offered to this house, nor can I hide from myself that I am mainly responsible for it."

"Sir!" cried Neville, springing to his feet and pointing to the desk where, true to his careless character, he had left the letter to Castlereagh, "I may have sold my place but not my daughter's honour. I need no apology from you. I am still master of sufficient servants to have this fellow—this scullion—whipped from under my roof. Now, go!"

Mr Gash was himself in a moment, with an almost imperceptible glance he noted the position of the paper, then he lifted his hand deprecatingly, but paused, something catching his quick ear above the babble in the dining-room—the sound of splintered glass.

Suddenly the noise downstairs died away and a voice

could be heard speaking loudly in the succeeding stillness.

"What is it?" said Neville, looking round. Gash impatiently beckoned him, and together they hastened out, leaving Irene, who was now recovering consciousness, to the care of the waiting-women and Miss Prudence.

On reaching the dining-room the first words Neville heard were uttered by Miss Bird. "The damned cowards!" she cried, her lovely face pale with rage, "to run before a herd of cow-boys and a mass-priest!"

"What is the matter?" cried Neville, authoritatively, pushing his way to one of the French windows, now flung open.

Just outside in the middle of a flower-bed stood a reeking horse, foam whitening its quivering nostrils, foam flecking chest, and flank bloody with brutal spurring. Beside the steed drooped a man, helmetless, blood on his pale cheek, his boots, and red coat grey with dust, save where great patches of perspiration dulled it to a deeper shade, a swordless scabbard dangling at his heel. It was Thorncroft, no longer the sprightly rascallion of the Hermitage, but a man on whom the fear of death had set its seal.

"How the devil did it happen?" cried "Lamby" Gore, "what was the cavalry doing?"

"Running like red-shanks, the damned cowards," replied Thorncroft huskily.

"You are here before them," observed Nellie Bird, "thank God you are not my brother!"

The sneer stung Thorncroft. "He'd be here before me if he were in my place," he said. "Can a man get a glass of anything here at all?"

"Kindly let us know what happened, sir?" said Neville, filling a tumbler with wine. "Won't you come in?"

Thorncroft shook his head. "Must obey orders," he

said, "Lieutenant Colonel Foote says Captain Plornish, who is I believe here, must come on to Wexford at once. Ha! Harrison, is the Captain there?"

"He is," replied Harrison, grinning, "but the news has been too much for him." He jerked his head contemptuously backward towards Plornish who sat in a state of weeping drunkenness pitiable to behold.

"What has happened?" asked Neville for the third time, handing the new-comer a tumbler of wine.

"Thankye," said Thorncroft, gratefully, and pouring a little of the residue into the palm of his hand, he washed with it the nostrils of his jaded steed. "It happened thus," he went on, throwing aside the glass in sheer nervousness. "We went out this morning a little over three hundred, to Oulart Hill. There was a great crowd of rebels at the top, women I mean, you could see their aprons fluttering a long way off, and near an old fence running across it, some fellows with pikes and pitch-forks and scythes—a few had guns, one was a longshore thing. The infantry did not mind Foote who was in command and was for halting, but began the attack, some of 'em taking off their boots and leaving 'em in a hut so they could hunt the croppies better. The rebels went back towards the wall, while we cantered round to catch 'em as they ran. I was on the flank and saw it all. Thinking the rebel croppies were in full retreat, Lombard and the foot pressed on shouting that the North Cork would beat 'em out of the field. By this the croppies were behind the wall, and seeing us waiting, determined to die game—at least that's what I thought when I saw their hats show again over the stones, and what's more, the infantry thought so too, because they let drive and came on quickly with the bagnet by G—d! Then, about six raparees rose from behind the wall and fired, and I noticed some of our men fall, there was another volley from the left flank and more fell, and you could hear the officers Boyd and

Ware and the rest, screeching to them to close up. Of course we all understood now that the fire of the North Corks had been drawn by a ruse, the fellows putting their damned caubeens on their pikes, but it was too late, for the rebels were over the wall and among them. They made a sort of fight, but they had no chance against the reach of the pikes and scythes, so they broke and ran. 'Egad, the cavalry will be wanted now,' says I to myself, and I jumped the nag over the road fence: 'Come on, boys,' says I, 'and we'll cover the retreat!' But damn the man was there; they slipped off while the infantry was making the stand and I was so much occupied watching it that I didn't hear 'em—else I'd have gone with the rest. So I powdered away across the fields, thinking the foot would make a rally behind the hedges near the road, but the rebels outran 'em, and every few seconds you'd see some poor devil piked, trying to climb those break-neck fences, the men who had their boots off made the best race. As God is my judge, I never saw the like! In five minutes the place was covered with flying men pulling off their coats, throwing away their arms and screaming for quarter and not getting it. God! they butchered 'em like sheep in the shambles. One fellow cut my bridle rein, but I slashed his head, though it seemed to make no difference; another caught my boot but I gave point in his face and so cleared. There were two officers close to me, one was Foote himself. A rebel made a thrust at him, he parried it, but his coat was ripped across the chest, another wounded him in the arm, but his nag was a good one. The other was Ware of the North Cork, he sliced a pike in two and was just clear of the press when a damned drummer caught his boot heel. 'Oh God, Mr Ware, save me!' says he, and poor Ware trying to pull the wretch along was piked. A footman gripped my stirrup leather. 'Let go!' says I. 'No, damn me,' says he, 'you brought us here and

you'll take us hence,' but a fellow with a scythe making at a cut at the horse's leg, caught him across the stomach, and his guts ran over his breeches. So I got free once more, but breaking my sword against the scythe when the rebel slashed at me also. Foote and I and a sergeant quilted out along the Wexford road, the women whose cabins the North Cork burnt in the morning cursing us as we went. Foote said the Hermitage detachment should return at once, and as Plornish said this morning he was coming to Malplaquet I swam the river and came on. That's all I know."

He paused and for a minute no one spoke. It made a strange, bizarre picture amid the heavenly peace of the Sabbath evening, the windows of the dining-room crowded by that startled company, some of whom had come out upon the gravelled walk, the uniforms of the men chequered by the fantastic toilettes of the ladies who hung in the embrasures, their cheeks yet flushed from the dance, their bosoms heaving under twinkling gems, their staring eyes bent upon that messenger of woe.

There was a clattering of accoutrements from the stable-yard whose high gate being closed, had obliged Thorncroft to ride round to the main entrance, and Harrison appeared leading his horse, a red spot on either cheek bone.

"Where's Plornish?" asked Thorncroft, climbing stiffly into the saddle. "He's responsible, he must return at once."

"Curse him," replied Harrison, "he is staggering about the stable drunk, trying to harness the horse—the servants have gone off with the rebels."

There was a muffled sound in the distance, quite low, but quite distinct, more like the wind in a grove, or the thunder of distant surf than any other sound in the world, and down the curving road came a single horseman flying.

The encircling wall of the park was not very high, and rising in the stirrups, he saw the uniforms on the lawn.

Like a flash, he was through the gap, and galloped almost to the door; he was Plown.

"Thorncroft—Harrison!" he yelled, "ride for your lives! They took the Hermitage! The country is up! They're coming here for Plornish, someone told 'em—where is he?"

"In the stable," rejoined Harrison, priming his second pistol, "drunk and praying."

"Let him go to hell then, come on to New Ross!"

"Isn't Wexford nearer?" said Thorncroft.

"All who will get to Wexford to-night are there now, Harrigan and a couple of others," shouted Plown. "Do you hear that?"

Aye they heard it; the dull roar had taken a sharper edge, and had hardened into a deadly cry, like the baying of countless dogs. The yeoman without another word, wheeled round and rode furiously down the avenue, and out of sight of the hushed spectators at the windows.

Fanny Gore darted a swift look among the gentlemen, and ran to the door, brushing past Irene who had returned to the room. She encountered Gash at the library door, he was putting something carefully in his pocket-book; his sword was at his side and his hat on his head. She ran to him, a lovely palpitating vision of cream and saffron, her bare exquisitely moulded arms revealed by the sleeveless gown as she raised them in child-like entreaty.

"They are coming!" she cried, "Run!" And hastening along by his shoulder she told him Plown's brief story. His face was bloodless and his fingers shuffled nervously as he busied himself with the girth of his steed, for they were now in the stable. But his voice was steady. "Pshaw," he said, "a few yelping curs, Rosinante will soon outdistance them."

"But the officers are in mortal terror," whispered the girl, "they would not wait a moment for that wretched man."

"I do not doubt it," he replied, "let the leathers alone,

I'm not an Arab horseman." But he kissed the willing brown hands trembling on the brave mare's neck, wishing they were another's, and she kissed the gallant steed, uneasily switching its tail, and with ears laid back, listening to the snorts and stamps of the horse Plornish had led out and was mounting, held by Neville himself.

"Perhaps you had better remain here, sir," they heard the latter saying with measured politeness, "the mare is tired and frightened?"

"No!" snapped Plornish, "they'll never catch me. I know the road to Ross too well, I was there to-day—liberating your cousin, damned nice treatment I got for it. Come on, Gash."

Gash and Fanny Gore were in the yard now, the hasty banging of shutters all over the house could be distinctly heard, crossed by sharp excited voices, and hysterical baying of Shot. Neville himself undid the gate which someone had closed after Harrison, and Plornish rode through, his sword drawn, his epaulets jogging up to his ears. Neville held it ajar with a beckoning glance to Gash, but swift as lightning, Miss Gore who had stepped forth a second, sprang back, flung her trembling body upon its rough timbers with the strength of desperation, and drove the bolt home herself, leaning against it then, pale as death, listening.

And what a sound for a woman's ear was that which shrieked from the road and grounds over whose boundary wall she caught the rapid passing of pike-heads! A second later it swelled into a horrid yell, the foremost of the pursuers rushing in by the main entrance, having seen Plornish riding down the avenue towards them.

"There is a back way, is there not?" remarked Mr Gash, "I may get off thus, Major Heathcote told me to-day he intended returning here this evening. If I meet him I shall bring him on if he has force with him, as he probably will have."

Neville bowed with cold courtesy. "There is a door,"

he said, "but they will be sure to watch it, however you might get out by the side entrance from the garden by the laurels——"

"Father!" shrieked Irene herself from the window of the breakfast parlour, "they will murder the poor wretch—speak to them. They appear to be strangers, but some may know you!"

Neville rushed back into the house, Fanny Gore wrung her hands, Mr Gash, corpse-like on brow and cheek, took his pistols from the holsters and transferred them to his belt; then he drew his sword and smiled.

Suddenly Irene hastened into the yard, a key in her hand. "Come!" she cried, "you may get off by the Enniscorthy road."

She flitted before them, opening a small door set amid a tangle of walls by the orchard, and led them thence to the rustic gate opening on the passage bordered by laurels which led into the public highway surrounding the irregular inclosure of stables and out-houses, the space between the little avenue and the road being planted by ornamental shrubs, which served the double purpose of filling the interval and hiding the somewhat unsightly gables of the steading at the back.

Gash put his foot in the stirrup, the sword dangling loose from his wrist, Irene opened the gate, but Fanny Gore who had lifted herself on the trellis-shaped ornamentation, shrunk down, and beckoned them into the shade of the bay trees; the portion of the passage near the entrance was filled with armed men.

CHAPTER XIII

THE three stood silent within pike's length of the silent watchers lurking amid the shrubs. The horse impatiently pawed the gravel; Fanny Gore imperiously beckoned Gash's sword, he gave it to her, a question in his eyes. Fanny silently cut from her quivering body the saffron skirt and swiftly divided it into four parts, the good steel shearing noiselessly through the soft material, then with the aid of ribbands from their attire, the two girls dexterously muffled the charger's hoofs. It was done with a rapidity impossible to emulate in the telling, but even while they were still on their knees a raucous shout from the shrubbery and the pounding of a gallop broke the stillness.

Those in ambush were laughing at something which was taking place by the ornamental railing outside the garden that stretched away from the house at one side.

There was now the rush and crackle of men tearing their way through the bushes, and then the crunching of many feet rang on the walk. Whither would they turn?

"Ha, ha, Gash himself couldn't show better sport," cried one, "come along, boys, we'll have a look at the fun. Hunt him round again!"

The horse-hoofs thundered past before the house again, and the three listeners heard a shrill blasphemy followed by a woman's laugh. For one shivering instant the men in the passage appeared about to come by the gate, but the clatter of their scrambling feet showed they were clambering over the wall instead.

As they sprang into the orchard Irene flung the gate open, and Mr Gash rode silently out, at the same moment the man who had spoken saw him from the other side, and uttered a shout. Mr Gash touched the mare with his heel, and she flew along the narrow walk, Irene and Fanny sped back to the house and rushed to the window on the stair-case.

The men in the orchard dashed back to the wall, two or three were still on it, one was crossing the walk, in a second he was ridden down by the silent horseman, another made a furious thrust with a shortened pike, the girls saw the sword flash and heard the clink of jarring steel. For one fainting instant they thought he was stopped, but a moment later the dark crouching figure flitted on between the laurels, again they saw the sword flash and fall, again they heard the baffled roar of rage as a fresh body charged up by the entrance a second too late, and then with a sob of relief the girls fell into each other's arms, and wept—Irene, she scarce knew why, Fanny, hysterically thanking the God she had rarely troubled by orisons during her short life.

Mingled with the prayer came a strangling shriek from the lawn and they left the window, but Fanny begging a loan of one of her friend's dressing-gowns, the delay spared them the sight of what was being enacted there.

When Plornish had seen the crowds pouring in through the gap in the wall and up the avenue, he hesitated, rode back to the gate, and finding it barred, pushed across the front of the house, now shuttered, and galloped towards a low fence marked by a line of poplars dividing the grounds from some acres set aside for farming operations. The wall was low, but the horse a spiritless, jaded animal refused it, nearly unseating his rider, and at the moment a terrible band of men and women swarmed into the adjoining field.

In a second Plornish was sober, he saw himself the centre of a circle rudely armed slowly ranging nearer

as the curving line of floats shows the approach of the net closing round its prey. They seemed hardly dangerous as they came on, led by a bare-legged woman, a sickle in her hand; some even laughed but their laughter froze his blood.

He rode forward madly, striving to ride through them as a bolder man might have done, but his will was unsteady, and his horse too swerved from the uplifted bludgeons and cruel pitchforks with which she was driven back. He felt a sharp sting in the left shoulder, and uttered a cry, he had been stabbed; a second in the nostrils sent the mare on her haunches. Then a man at the other side wounded him again, and darted back from the unskilful parry, laughing.

Clinging to the pommel, the yeoman was borne back towards the house.

"What's the matter with you?" cried "Lamby" Gore from the drawing-room window, "ride at 'em where there are no pikes!"

The advice was good and had it been acted upon Plornish might have lived to torture many a woman between the Slaney and the Nore.

Opposite was a group of women thinning at the moment, and armed only with stones, but as they rushed forward shrieking, the mare shied and the last chance was gone. The body of men who had been in ambush now plunged through the flower-garden maddened by the escape of Gash, and formed a second line.

"They are playing with him," said Blood, "have you any guns, Neville?"

"No," replied the other breathlessly, "I have been just now to the gun-room, and there isn't a single fowling-piece —all gone."

"No matter," said the planter, "we have our pistols, good God! Look!"

At the words a terrible scream came from the lawn, Plornish who had nerved himself for a last rush, broke

through the women and was hacking at the pikes when a thrust in the face made him drop the bridle.

"Now, Saxon, for your sister!" shouted the woman with the sickle, as a pikeman hooked him under the breast-belt and dragged him from his horse. Across the trampled flower-beds he was dragged, screaming for mercy now, amid a tempest of inhuman yells, stabbed again and again all over his writhing body. "Jesus, Son of David!" he shrieked once, and a pike-head tore his tongue in two! The woman seizing a stone fell on her knees beside the battered head and thrust it into the blood-welling mouth, and hammered it between the gaping jaws with another while the shearing scythes wrenched the limbs almost from the quivering body.

There was the report of a pistol, and the woman fell dead beside her victim.

"Not bad for a long shot," said Blood as he reloaded, the pungent smell of the gunpowder with which they were yet to be so familiar filling the women's nostrils in that bright, gilded room. Another report followed; Nellie Bird who had taken a pistol from her brother fired, wounding a man in the cheek, as with unpractised hand he aimed one of the pistols taken from Plornish's holsters.

"Stop firing!" cried Neville anxiously; "they could smash through this place like a house of glass, there are so many of them. Wait, I'll speak to them!"

He stepped to the window; the man below lifted his arm and fired. Neville put his hand to his forehead, and without a word fell backward, shot through the brain.

The next instant the shutters quivered under a rain of countless blows, and the gentlemen hurried down to hold the lower story, while the ladies hastily barred the drawing-room windows, and then clustered around Irene holding her father's head in her lap.

For a brief moment only the sound of splintered glass could be heard below, and soon after the shutters, drummed upon at every side, began to resound terribly,

but with that noise came sharp reports from within and yells from without. The reports grew quicker and quicker, and the heavy grey smoke stole up the deserted staircase and permeated the room, making the blanched faces of the watchers more ghastly still.

An incessant thundering reverberated through the quivering house, the regular crashing of huge missiles; the window shutters were being deliberately beaten in by stones torn from the walls and garden rockeries, the impact dominating the fire of the garrison.

Unable to bear the suspense, one of the ladies, who told the tale to her great-grandchildren, stole down the stairs grey with other smoke than powder now, to where Nellie Bird with grimy fingers was loading a pistol for Gore and laughing scorn at the inarticulate rage outside.

Timber could no longer resist the continuous battering, and ere long the shutters of the window whence the girls had seen Gash escape and those of the dining-room were hanging loose from their hinges, though held in position still by the stout iron bars crossing them, the assailants cheering as they caught the gleam of lace and steel within.

The great main door was by this time groaning under vigorous blows of a sledge-hammer, and a moment later a mass of limestone hurled by a powerful arm smashed through the riven wood of the window nearest, stretching Smith senseless on the carpet. O'Daly snatched the pistol from his hand and fired, but reeled back himself before the torrent of blows which beat the last barriers asunder.

Smith dazed staggered to his feet, a pike-head grazing his sword-belt. He drew and slashed at it; another flickered past the sill, and he dropped, stabbed to the heart.

A second cheer rang and quivered outside now, a cheer reinforced by the shrill cries of women and the clapping of hands. Then the passages were illuminated by a fierce glow, and volumes of smoke began to pour in through the

splintered wood on three sides of the house, huge fascines of furze saturated with tar from the sheep-shed being flung from pitch-forks against the windows. And high above the crackling of the flames came the vengeful yells of the maddened throng plying torch and steel, as the hall door fell in, while the smoke rolled through the corridors and thickened on the spacious landings, and coiled along the stairs in such dense masses that the defenders called to each other through the din, and then groped their way to the stair-foot, some to perish miserably beneath the pikes of those who entered by the front.

Gore, Blood, Calton and a few others succeeded in reeling to the drawing-room, their clothes torn, their faces bleeding, the sleeves and ruffles of their right arms wet and smoking.

"Open the windows, for God's sake!" stammered Blood, whose sword had broken, but who with a hunting crop snatched from the stand had literally slashed his way to the room. "It can't last much longer, but let's get a breath of air while we may!"

Irene wrenched the shutters apart, and flinging up the sash looked recklessly out, a column of dense black smoke curving upward over her head.

The place below was alive with a tumultuous sea of tossing pikes and fluttering garments circling hither and thither in whirling confusion. To and fro went the rioters, some darting from the house bearing portions of furniture, only to fling them aimlessly amid the flower-beds, and then rush in for more; some were dancing in sheer light-headedness of insanity where a cask of wine was being broached, stopping now and then to scream vindictively at the burning building. Suddenly an old man caught sight of her, and removing his hat, pointed to his head swathed in bandages. "Pitch-cap!" he yelled, "how would you like it?" Others looked up, too, and cursed her with horrid imprecations.

She was far calmer than she could have supposed, had her most extravagant imaginings conjured up such a scene. Just below, she noted a knot of early roses blooming undisturbed amid the ruin, and remembered that she had forgotten to cut any that morning; some of the people shouted at her as she hung there, and others cried shame, and then from amongst them a familiar face took shape, and hobbling through the seething mass came old Nancy.

"Miss Irene," she piped, "keep up your heart; he's coming and the pikemen—I gave word."

"Who is coming?" cried Fanny Gore, Irene having heard the woman with uncomprehending stare. A distant trumpet blast flaunted down the evening breeze.

Shot barked madly.

"Soldiers!" shrieked Nellie Bird, who had seen her brother die, and she patted Shot's head, "Good dog! By Heaven you were worth your feed! Stand to your guard, gentlemen, we'll have a life for every hair on Sam's head!"

Crash went the upper panels, disclosing a mob of furious faces against the red reflection of the conflagration, the furniture with which the door had been hastily barricaded going over amid a thunderous din, and a torrent of darting steel surged across the *débris*.

Gore and the few left alive, sprang forward with a cheer, their bloody swords stabbing fiercely in the press, and for a raving minute it seemed as if the assailants encumbered by their long pikes, would be driven back. But, even while the hope rose in the eyes of the frantic women watching the desperate fight, Gore stabbed mortally reeled and fell at his mother's feet, the shattered blade grasped yet in his right hand, the brave foolish face upturned to the painted harlots on the ceiling. Almost at the same instant the remaining defenders were hacked down or trodden under foot as the mad deluge foamed into the room, a scream of victorious flame above them.

"You demons!" shrieked Mrs Gore on her knees. "See what you have done!"

The egotism of the cry might have provoked a smile, but the frenzied men took her seriously.

"An' phwat did he do?" shrieked a man tearing off his hat, his bare scalp wrinkled into a hundred folds of crimsoned flesh. "An' phwat did his Hell crew do to my daughter? Aha!" he yelled, transfixing the lifeless body with a terrible thrust, "that's for Bridgie Lonergan of the Crass Roads!"

"Oh, whist, Micky," shrilled old Nancy's voice as she panted from her frantic race up the stairs, "sure the bye is dead—he had nothing to do with it—lave him to God. Sure all the men are dead—ye ped 'em well. Look, there's only the women left!"

The smoke thinned off, passing through the other windows, now flung open. Seeing only a group of terrified women huddled together in the far corner, the exultant men drew back.

Yes, those maddened, ignorant peasants filled with the memory of nameless outrage offered to wife and daughter left those of their cruel foemen untouched—unharmed—although protected by no other shield than their helplessness, no other merit than their sex.

A trumpet blast rang and roared above the din outside, and up from the carousing crowd wavered the cry—"The sojers, the sojers!"

As the spur to the steed, so that cry to the men in the room, and turning by one impulse, they clattered down the stairs, eager to meet the enemy, now that they had arms in their hands.

Along the avenue a line of scarlet was speeding swiftly, cold steel flashing above the gleam of brazen helmets, and in advance two gentlemen, Heathcote and Gash. For one instant the mob made a confused stand, but with a shout the horsemen rode them down, or sent them flying through the house out towards the orchard, where

however Heathcote's rapid glance as he stalked up the stair a few troopers at his heel, showed they were rapidly reforming.

Irene felt an arm thrown round her, and a hot face close to her own; she looked up and found herself in the embrace of Gash.

"Irene," he whispered, "my darling, God knows I wish I were lying there instead of your father!"

She strove to put him away with a pathetically feeble gesture. "Leave me," she sobbed, "this is your work—all your work!"

A terrible crash drowned her words, one of the floors had fallen in. Gash started.

Heathcote strode over to the girl, sank on his knee, and lifted her bodily. She put her throbbing head against his shoulder and sobbed aloud.

"My little maid of the old days," he said simply, "God knows I am sorry!"

Not another word was said, the terrified ladies had already fluttered down the stairs, and a threatening murmur came from the rear of the house where Irene's doves were blindly circling in the spark-spangled smoke, the people crowding away towards the main road with the evident intention of blocking it.

Mrs Gore, frantic with grief, refused to be comforted, and hung over her son's corpse until a sergeant and Fanny Gore drew her away by gentle force.

Attracted by her cries, Irene looked over Heathcote's shoulder, and saw the desolation which had come upon her home and her life within the last half hour. There, yonder, was the piano where Blood had sung two nights ago, underneath lay the singer, very silent now; there sat the grinning Indian god who had listened to the wanton jest, regarding the jesters grimly from his bracket now; there lay her father with old Nancy bending over the lifeless body and straightening the limbs, while Shot crouched near licking the lifeless hand, blood from

pike thrusts splotching her shimmering coat, as she watched with dying eyes the kindly face that would never smile again.

Then, suddenly realizing everything, the girl made a desperate effort to wrench herself from the soldier's arms, but with a courteous violence, he held her close, and bore her away, leaving the generous host amid his silent guests trailing across the great gilded room where they had laughed and fought and died.

PART II

CHAPTER XIV

THE mansion was now fairly alight, and one side glowed like a furnace under the curving column of smoke that rolled languidly upward from the burning rooms where gilded ebony and lacquered rosewood blazed merrily.

"They mean to block the Enniscorthy road," said Gash breathlessly, as he drew Fanny Gore's almost insensible body towards him.

"I thought of that," replied Heathcote, and he gave the order to march.

As the troop went through the gate he rode rapidly to the right past the break in the wall where the passage of their helmets could be plainly seen from the house now again occupied by the rioters, then, hidden by the enclosure, he rode through the second gap at the opposite side which he had used the preceding night and led his men back along the outskirts of the plantation before the gate. Sheltered thus, they passed the building again, seeing the forked tongues of flame darting to and from the attic windows, and still under cover of the surrounding thickets, crossed several of the by-roads, intersecting the locality. Before them lay the river, shimmering in the dusk, but Heathcote did not care to risk the passage then, knowing that the country at the opposite bank must be by this time roused; so with many a detour, they struck out on the highway once more.

"They will return to pillage when they do not find us," he remarked, as confused shouting showed that the people had discovered the ruse. But even as he spoke a yell from the rear proclaimed that they had been

traced, and they broke into a gallop, hoping to shake off their pursuers whom they could see pouring up from a side path, and who were they soon found almost as swift as the horses themselves, the pace of the chargers being considerably impeded by the helpless burdens many of them bore.

"Shall we try a charge, sir?" asked a sergeant, "the men in the rear are lighter."

"No," answered Heathcote, and he pointed to a body of horsemen coming on by a narrow lane parallel with the road, some of the very troop he had encountered the foregoing night, "Don't you see yonder fellows would cross the field in a twinkling if we made the rush, and take us on the flank? No, let's race 'em and so wear out the footmen. Would God I knew of a ford!"

"There is one not very far off," panted Nellie Bird, jogging behind the sergeant, "an officer who brought us the news of Oulart swam it a short time ago, I know it is somewhere here."

"Yes, so there is, about a mile off," cried Fanny Gore, "sometimes it is impassable, but we ought make it now; that by-path where the horsemen are has twists in it too further on and curves away from this for some distance—they must follow it on account of the ditches and fences. They are Shielmaliers, I know the uniform."

"Good lass," laughed Heathcote, "So! We'll race 'em. Is there a cross road from that to this?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "a little below the ford."

"Aha, I understand. Trot—gallop. See how they go."

On went the red line with heavy pounding of hoofs, on flew the string of horsemen along the parallel road, and were speedily neck a neck of the column, while the swift-footed peasants bounded behind, with unshod feet that pattered lightly in the dust.

"If that fellow sits on our quarter thus," muttered

Heathcote, casting a quick look over his shoulder, "we are done for, he has only to cross that field when we make our dash for the ford, and signal the others. Aha, he means to cut us off, then there's a chance of giving him the slip."

The horsemen were now going much more rapidly for the lane which joined the high-road some distance away began to describe a wide arc occasioned by some high fences and a half drained bog, ere long they drew completely ahead, but shouting shrilly, and waving their swords, the cries of the pursuers were beginning to dwindle, as the pace told.

"Hah," exclaimed Fanny Gore, "the ford!" She pointed to a shallow reach of the river where some small black cattle of Wexford were leisurely wading through the limpid water; and as she spoke Heathcote muttered an impatient oath and shifted Irene in the saddle.

Far away on the dusty road a line of rapidly approaching steel was twinkling, at its head another knot of horsemen.

"Ah, they think they have us in a trap," said Heathcote, "so they would, cleverly too, if we did not know of the ford. Listen," he continued, when they had ridden some little way and when the first body of horsemen was drawing rein in order to unite with the second now passing the junction of road and boreen, "when I give the order, 'Sheath swords!' do so; but immediately wheel, and ride slap over the fence into the ford. Then, form on the other bank and give them the steel as they cross. Steady. Ha-a-a-lt. Trumpeter, sound a parley."

The pikemen and the two bodies of cavalry trotting somewhat confusedly, were very near now. Seeing the soldiers halt, they pulled up also.

"Good!" muttered Heathcote, "A chance the more. What terms for surrendry?" he shouted as the trumpet blast died away.

"Your lives," answered the leader of the party,

Devereux, and yell from the rear gave point to his words.

"Sheath swords!" cried Heathcote.

The men obeyed, and a cheer went up from the insurgent horse. But the next moment the troopers swung round, climbing the fence where it had been broken away in the immediate vicinity of the ford and spurring sharply across a path intersecting a field, rode into the water just as the first of the following mob with short panting shouts rounded a corner of the road.

In an instant all was confusion, the half-disciplined pikemen and the masterless crowd which had sacked Malplaquet running madly over the fence, and lining up along the bank in a vain attempt to cut off the rear-guard of the little column, while Devereux shouted to make way for the cavalry, the dragoons being by this time at the opposite side.

"Drop the women!" cried Heathcote when they had cantered forward clear of the cattle running helter skelter, and the men wheeled into line.

As if by one accord the breathless ladies slipped from the saddles and ran aside to a little tussock-tufted mound.

"Right about face; charge!" roared the soldier's brazen voice, and with a hoarse cheer the dragoons sped back across the short, sun-dried grass and pebbly strand, catching the insurgent cavalry as it struggled through the mid-channel.

Taken at a disadvantage, the patriot yeomen, unlike their comrades at Oulart, fought desperately, but with the loss of one of their number were forced in confusion to the other side, where Devereux rallied them gallantly, the pikemen falling back while the few who had guns opened a sharp fire on the soldiers now retiring in their turn. But as they stemmed the river Devereux charged, and wheeling round, the dragoons closed with their foe, a fierce fight taking place along the shallows by the shore

in the gathering dusk, the splash of plunging horse hoofs, the clink of accoutrements, and the rasping clash of swords being punctuated by the dropping fire from the marksmen on the bank. The water churned into foam, reddened as it boiled about the struggling groups, the English fighting with low, muffled oaths like the growl of an angry bull-dog unable to shake off his foe, the Irish with sharp cheers that seemed to drive every blow and thrust home.

Heathcote cut down one trooper, but reeled in his saddle from a blow which lopped away the crest of his helmet; recovering himself, he slashed furiously at his opponent, Devereux, who parried the cut with amazing dexterity and lounging almost at the same moment, tore open the soldier's stock at the side of his throat.

"Aha, that's a French trick!" laughed Devereux.

"And there is an Indian one to match it!" retorted Heathcote, striking at his enemy's head, but cutting his bridle-rein instead, receiving as he spoke a blow which bit through the brass of his helmet.

At length discipline prevailed, and by desperate exertions the dragoons beat off the Irish cavalry past the centre of the stream, the mad plunging of the yeomen's half-trained steeds contributing to their discomfiture, and Heathcote gave orders to take the women up again and retire.

The little cavalcade set off accordingly at the quickest pace available, one or two wounded troopers jogging behind, holding by their pommels, while six of their comrades lay sobbing their lives out by the Slaney shore.

Irene, who had watched the fight by the ford with strange apathy, looked longingly back over Heathcote's shoulder and saw only the glow upon the summer sky which marked the spot where her home was burning, and remained watching it thus with tearless eyes until the bend of a hill took it from her sight for ever.

The little town of Enniscorthy climbing its hill-sides

on either bank of the Slaney, was in a state of dire confusion when the jaded party reached its welcome shelter. Yeomen infantry paraded the streets, valiantly cursing the Papist bog-trotters, or yelling obscenity through shuttered windows in the pious hope that it would pollute the ears of Catholic women cowering within. Runaway troopers swaggered and swore at every turn of the winding ways, while from billet and tavern streamed the loud talk of nervous men concerning the enormous numbers and superior armament of the rebels who had that eventful day routed the King's troops at Oulart.

Truly there was not wanting cause for grave anxiety, tales of riot and disaster being hourly brought in by white-lipped fugitives from the surrounding country, where a torch-like flame blazing upon the velvet shadows of the summer night marked Carrigrew, the encampment of the victorious peasantry. Groups of gossips, clustering together at corners, related how Bookey's body had been discovered by the Heathfield cavalry, seventy guineas and his watch untouched. The story of how the same troop found the two Webster girls crouching in their night rails beneath the shrivelling blossoms of the orchard as they watched their flaring roof-tree, was enlarged upon; so too was the fate of the cabin-burning pastor, Turner of Edermines, half of whose face was blown off ere he perished miserably in the flames of his own house. The murder of Burrows of Kyle was told with varying circumstance, and likewise the escape of the girl, Piper, who having seen her brother-in-law piked, stole off through an open window, sprang on a horse's back, and clattered into Enniscorthy with the news.

At some difficulty, therefore, Heathcote succeeded in obtaining a room for Irene and Miss Phaire, mainly indeed through the kindness of Captains Snowe and Pounden, who provided too for the rest of the party. They were directed to a house beside the war-worn for-

tress of Raymond le Gros, where they were received by a lady in black who, although a despised Papist, bore herself with a gentle dignity which satisfied even Miss Prue, keenly alive even at that moment to the great question of gentility.

"Captain Pounden tells me that this lady's sister was shot by a Hessian, through mistake, a few days ago, and she will I trust out of her own sorrow find some pity for yours," said Heathcote. Then he briefly narrated the events of the afternoon.

The lady on hearing the names of her guests suddenly looked up, a smile of welcome in her faded eyes, and coming forward, took the drooping girl in her arms. "Your father once did me and mine a kindness," she said, through her tears, "and although my own heart is nearly broken, dear, I bless God that he has put it in my way to repay in some fashion the debt for which I had gratitude alone to offer."

So it came to pass that Irene Neville slept on that night which had beheld her utmost misery, beneath the roof of a friend, for her father had made many such friends in the course of his futile life, as men of his kind do, and perhaps the noblest as well as the most characteristic thing in their philanthropy is that only a social cataclysm is ever likely to give their debtors a chance of repayment.

Next day, Mr Gash, Mrs Gore, her daughter and Nellie Bird set out from Enniscorthy, the former ladies bound for Newtownbarry, the latter for Carnew.

The little party under the escort of some ununiformed mounted yeomen, rode at a quick pace from the town, by the Carlow approach, crossing the Scarawalsh Bridge further on, and keeping beside the Slaney, Mr Gash pointing out that it would be safer to go by Gorey which had a garrison, than by the direct route.

Occupied with bitter thoughts, they rode silently on through the deserted country, seeing on either hand the

...press purpose of driving th
frenzy.

"The curs!" muttered Mr
croppies will pike 'em to a ma
'em!"

This pious wish would have
able personal inconvenience a fe
his escort went, if his quick eye
dust blown towards the party ove
It might have passed for the smo
dwelling, but soon the hum of
its true significance, and with a r
party to the shelter of a bush-gir
dismounted, and waited breathless
horses by short, broken whispers.

The buzzing hum began to ta
dull thud of marching feet and the
through at intervals, presently th
motley band of peasants stepping
precision. A few had fire-arms,
the most part, though Gash n
carbines, evidently brand new,
pikes or scythes whose burnishe
in the sunlight.

On and on they went, in a long
too with a somewhat laggard step
of fatigue, talking to one anot
watchers catching every now and

martialled the ragged files into closer order. Another man now arrived, nodding his head to the peasants, who touched their hats at intervals. His face was turned towards the coppice, and they saw the flash of his clear blue eyes as he laughed at something the first horseman had said. Then he raised his hand, and the moving ranks came to a halt. Rising in his stirrups, he addressed the men before him, holding aloft a green flag which drooped in the gentle breeze. The address was short, and the loyalists heard little of it save the words, "Balliorrell Hill," taken up and repeated in varying tones until they dwindled into the distance, and the line began to march again.

"Balliorrell Hill? where is that?" asked Gash, softly, as he disengaged Fanny Gore's hand from his, and the dust was dying down.

"It's just near the town, yer haner," replied the yeoman.

"Oho," observed Mr Gash, a sudden light breaking over his face, "then they mean to take the offensive, if they do, they are likely to give our bold dragoons a little trouble. That fellow on the brown mare seemed to know what he was about."

"That's Tom Sinnot of Kilbride, I know him," answered the yeoman, "and the other is Murphy, the priest, who was at Oulart Hill yesterday; they burned his chapel at Boolevogue, though Captain King didn't want it done."

Nellie Bird spat out, "I should like to have his heart and roast it!" she said simply.

"Would not his head on a dish suffice?" smiled Mr Gash, "you can hardly hope for his heart—Popish priests don't marry."

"Pah!" retorted the girl with a coarseness of tone which underlay the refinement of her manner. "You do not know what it is to hate, sir!"

"But I know what it is to be hated," rejoined the spy with a sudden darkening of the face, and Fanny Gore's skirt brushed his boot.

"But," he added after a pause, while he pinned a green rosette to his hat—

> "Say pretty Tory where's the jest
> Of wearing orange on the breast,"

and he glanced at the knot of yellow ribband Miss Bird wore at her bosom.

"They are my colours, sir," rejoined the girl bitterly, "when I change them it shall be to the scarlet of my heart's blood. Let who will, cringe and trim!"

Nevertheless, she was glad to hold her peace a few moments later when a belated contingent came on from the little village of Ferns, and cheered the colour of Mr Gash's cockade.

Advancing at a quick trot through the deserted country, they soon passed that smouldering village where King MacMurrough's tower and abbey mark the first mile-stone upon the bloody road of sorrow his weeping land has travelled since, then still pushing forward briskly, they came on Camolin whose pastor, pitch-cap Owens, had already been arrested by the peasantry, and passing the Bann, rode straight for Gorey, the foremost horses shying as they rounded a fence corner which revealed one of the pitiable sights of that awful time—a woman bearing on her shoulders the flaccid form of a dead man. Poor soul, her tear-blistered face grew ashen when Mr Gash accosted her, but, at a few words from Fanny Gore she regained her courage, and told them that the man was her husband, Tom Foxton, who had been shot by the people and whom she was taking into Gorey for burial. Telling her gracefully that they would send a conveyance directly they reached the town, Mr Gash signalled the yeomen to resume their trot, lest the question in her pleading eyes should take shape, and soon she dwindled behind them, a speck upon the white, silent road, staggering beneath her ghastly burden.

As they approached the place, their cheeks prindling

with the sharp salt of the sea breeze, Mr Gash saw with sinking heart that none of the red uniforms then so pleasing an adjunct to Irish scenery, were visible in the single street constituting the little town; as they came nearer a mournful howling from a pack of kennelless hounds wandering to and fro, chilled the hearers like a presage of future woe.

Still advancing, but more cautiously now, they entered the place. Every door was closed, every window barred, no cheerful laughter resounded from within, no smoke curled from the chimneys, but somewhere in the distance a woman's voice was cursing bitterly, and as they drew nearer the imprecations were mingled with groans from a group of men who lay in that sunny street, propped against a wall blood-stained and powder-blackened.

They ceased moaning as the horses' hoofs rang closer, and one raised his head, the woman whose voice they had heard, came towards them, a piece of lint in her hand.

"Where are the people?" asked Mr Gash.

"In their houses, for fear the yeos would come back, or with Father Murphy, God bless him!" she replied, a light of frenzy glinting in her eyes. "Look at what the dirty dogs did before they ran!" she continued, pointing at the men, "put 'em agen the wall and shot 'em like dogs! Oh, Mr Stopford," she went on, addressing a young man who had just ridden up from an opposite direction, "look at this—isn't it nice work—though you are not to blame for it?"

"Do you know where the troops are?" said Gash, recognizing the new-comer.

"At Arklow, sir," he replied, lifting his hat in acknowledgment of the ladies' presence, and glancing with a slightly puzzled air at the contradictory favours of the party. "I am returning thither, are you going also?"

"Yes," replied Mr Gash promptly.

"But, Mr Gash," cried one of the yeomen, "we don't want to go there, sure we are not going to Dublin!"

"Possibly, but I am!" replied Mr Gash suavely.

"But we are *not*, sir!" cried Nellie Bird indignantly, "we did not know you were going there, we are going to Newtownbarry; we have come quite far enough out of our road to convenience you."

"You have been very kind," observed Mr Gash pleasantly, "and for it I am your debtor. If you desire it, you may take yonder road to the left, and go there by Carnew, though I fear that as recent events are not quite forgotten in the surrounding district, the journey may prove disagreeable."

Nellie Bird bit her lip, her father having played a prominent part in the massacre at that town.

"Perhaps it would be better if you all come on to Arklow?" said Mr Stopford, who had watched this scene with a smile of dawning comprehension, "the country is rather disturbed just there, but here we are rather quiet," he added with unconscious humour as one of the murdered men rolled over on his side, the death rattle in his throat.

Nellie Bird swore. "Harkye, Mr Philip Gash," she said, a baleful light in her blazing eyes, "you are a very clever fellow I am told, and you have got a reputation for managing people, and you are playing a deep game I doubt not, but though my brother is dead, I have a father who will not relish the contemptible trick you thought fit to make me the victim of!"

She turned to Mrs Gore who seemed about to speak, but Fanny pulled her sleeve; Miss Bird detecting the gesture, laughed insolently.

"But, Mr Gash," expostulated one of the yeomen, emboldened by the remonstrance, "my commanding officer is at Newtownbarry, not at Arklow—we'll bid you good day, we have escorted you far enough, as the lady says. We are not going to Dublin to please you."

"You are going to Hell by a remarkably short route, if you disobey my orders," replied Mr Gash, drawing a pistol.

The man's yellow face turned purple, a silence fell upon the little party, and through it broke several dull, thudding reports, more like the crackling of linen drying on a line in a light breeze than of anything else; then there was ripple of them, then isolated, muffled, jerking reports again.

Mr Gash replaced his pistol. "I do not think any of us would care to return to Enniscorthy, or make for Newtownbarry either," he said, "I hardly think that your father would thank me for permitting your escort to do so, Miss Bird. We met a party of rebels under arms as we came thither, and made a detour to avoid them," he continued, "possibly they are in collision with the King's forces by this time."

"Then," said Mr Stopford, addressing Miss Bird particularly, "it will be much better to hurry into Arklow, some of the officers stationed there are friends of mine, and they may be able to get you accommodation, though we cannot promise much, most of the people from Gorey spent last night under the hedges, after running all the way through a cloud of dust in which they could hardly breathe."

"Poor people," observed Gash with a grin as he wheeled his steed beside the other, "they appear to have a keen sense of poetic justice," and he took the green ribband from his hat.

Stopford laughed somewhat awkwardly, "Well, I must say," he replied, "the rebels are not altogether without provocation."

Gash assented with another grin, and the party set forward once more. The country presently began to change its aspect and took a softer character, the loveliness of wood and water leading the eye from the deserted dwellings and the fields of trampled grain, while on the northern horizon the towering peak of Crogan Kinsella rose majestically, and suggested a topic which had even then power to draw men's minds from

the issues at stake around them—the probability of the new gold mines discovered there being reproductive to government.

As they approached Arklow by the sea a bizarre sight presented itself. Scattered far and wide along the shore and the river banks were little groups of people moving to and fro, some engaged in the erection of huts or of wattled enclosures. Pushing their way with considerable difficulty through the crowd which came flocking along on every side, eager for news, they reached a picket, and owing to the good offices of their guide, were admitted to the town where lodgings were procured for the wearied women, after considerable delay. Mr Gash had other business to transact, and when his steed had been sufficiently rested, set out in the cool of the evening for Dublin.

CHAPTER XV

THE shots which the party had heard came, as Mr Gash surmised, from a collision between the King's troops and the people at the little town of Enniscorthy. All the morning fugitives poured in from the surrounding district with tales of riot and bloodshed, the work of irresponsible crowds similar to those who had sacked Malplaquet. Some of the refugees were simply victims of civil war, like Bishop Cleaver of Ferns, but others, like the family of White, flying in blind terror before the well-earned vengeance of the tortured peasantry.

Enniscorthy is approached by many roads, and indeed may be described as built round an angle of the great one leading from Wexford to Dublin itself, which crossing the Slaney by the bridge uniting the town with Templeshannon on the opposite side, sweeps onward through the Duffrey Gate to Scarawalsh Bridge. This circumstance had already made its impression on Heathcote, and it was in no hopeful mood he repaired to the council hastily convened by Snowe, an officer who had served in the American war and was in command. The troops available numbered about five hundred, besides ununiformed yeomen and a large portion of the inhabitants who were not Catholics, a son of Irene's hostess being sent home contemptuously when he volunteered, his religion making him unfit in the opinion of the bigoted officers to bear arms for King George.

It was decided that some detachments should occupy Templeshannon, that a stronger force should hold the three approaches converging on Duffrey Gate Hill looking towards Carlow, whilst Snowe himself took post on the

bridge, a point whence he could help either flank. The civilian loyalists lined the walls, especially those along the Duffrey Gate and the houses overtopping them, the cavalry under Captain Richards and Major Heathcote patrolling the streets leading to and from the bridge.

Those dispositions completed, a quiet fell upon the town in striking contrast to the bustle which prevailed during the preceding night, and morning now verging towards noon, the blows of a hammer on the sash of a window near the bridge sounding through the stillness like the knocking of an impatient hand. In the distance, towards Drumgoole, along the green banks of the Slaney, and from a little island above the bridge, the bleating of lambs could be distinctly heard.

Noon came and went, but brought no foe, and wearied by the tension and the heat, the defenders broke into low-voiced conversation as they stood at their arms in the shadow of the walls and houses. Another hour crept slowly by before a bugle blast rang from the Duffrey Gate. The line of yeomen drawn out before it stiffened suddenly, shouldered arms, and stepped forward briskly—went some distance, and halted abruptly.

A body of men, about two hundred perhaps, was moving rapidly down the Carlow road, a string of skirmishers running along the line of advance; behind could be seen other bodies, the sun gleaming on their pike heads dulled by the dust of the march.

On came the insurgent column, halting, however, at musket range; there was a sharp order from the yeomen's line, and a volley crashed out. The attacking party answered by a cheer, and through the smoke it could be seen that they were deploying rapidly with the intention of cutting the troops off from the Gate. Then, as the latter fell back, a hail of bullets splattered against the wall, and was answered by an irregular volley from the townspeople; the fight had begun.

Another volley now whistled from the insurgents, and

several of the yeomen fell in little clouds of dust which their pumping blood quickly laid. Still the royal troops preserved formation, though retreating more quickly, but the skirmishers had by this taken up positions, and more than one defender of the wall reeled back before the fire of the sharpshooters, who aimed their long fowling-pieces with a deadly precision acquired in the days and nights when they haunted the low-lying lands by the Slaney in quest of darting snipe and whirring plover.

Suddenly, after a sharp volley, they closed and dashed for the Gate. There was a moment's dire confusion as the retreating soldiers blocked it, and already Snowe was hastening up with reinforcements, when Heathcote gave the order to charge, and the cavalry swept forth in column, a brave sight under the sunlight. Taken by surprise, the assailants now began to give way in turn, some going down before the horses, but the majority escaping nimbly over the fences on either hand, reformed, and opened a deadly fire upon the cavalry which wheeled and galloped back, the sun shining on many an empty saddle, while the infantry at the Gate and the townspeople on the walls commenced a furious fusilade on their opponents, who occupying the approaches answered it with terrible effect, the pikemen stealing nearer and nearer, waiting their chance.

Presently it came, and as the fire of the garrison weakened a moment they rushed forward, but Heathcote who had received reinforcements charged again into the struggling throng, and beat the pikemen off, but once more retired galled by the fire from behind the hedges, the smoke banking along the wall, and drifting away slowly across the green May fields, to disappear wraith-like amid the thickets by the river, shadowy strands of it even penetrating the streets of Templeshannon lying silent yet under the huge shoulder of Vinegar Hill.

On the road were seen many human forms, some in dull frieze, some in gaudy scarlet, most of them motion-

less; a riderless charger with severed bridle was quietly cropping the herbage along a fence side, and a dying peasant was hoarsely repeating the Lord's Prayer in Irish, the bloody bubbles breaking on his lips.

Rallying, the yeomen stood their ground manfully, doing their utmost to dislodge the sharpshooters, and the fierce rattle of musketry grew continuous, but every now and then a man on the walls or by the Gate would fall, attempt to rise, and roll over on his side with a gasping cough.

"They fight better than I looked for!" said Heathcote to Pounden of the Enniscorthys.

"Their aim is good," replied that officer, reloading his pistol, and misunderstanding the remark, "but our fellows will beat 'em from the field, they're heroes, sir; there's that Thompson yonder—him with the bandaged neck, he's just taken a spent ball from the side of it, and fired it back at the damned croppies. Lucky they haven't the sense of hares, see how they keep trying at this one point."

"Aye, but they are mending their hand," cried Captain Richards, pointing with his sword to the road leading from Dephney where pikes were gleaming. "Hallo—Snowe," he continued, turning to where that officer was marshalling his company, having hurried up, "all right here, file to the left!"

The Captain lifted himself in his stirrups and dashed forward in the direction indicated, but soon came galloping back, his face streaming with perspiration. "It's a feint!" he cried. "They are only crossing the road, to take us in the rear by the Slaney."

"Captain," shouted a yeoman, one John Macdonough, who came riding up from the bridge, "they are fording the river above the island, and trying for Templeshannon!"

"Hah, then they are being directed by someone who knows his business," said Heathcote as the North Cork wheeled round, and hurried back.

This was apparently the case, for the people on the wall saw a man whom they recognized and had often met upon that same Carlow road, waving his sword through the smoke clouds and shouting stentorian orders. A moment later he wheeled his horse aside, and down the approach came a stream of plunging cattle, their shaggy black coats powdered with dust, their sinewy limbs stretching into a mad gallop which could hardly outstrip the winged feet of the pikemen behind, and above them flashed a forest of bristling spears.

"Shoot the cows!" yelled Pounden, "or stop 'em with the bayonet," as a sheet of flame shrieked from every foot of cover outside, and the panting yeomen fell here and there as they desperately ran to check the rush of the cattle goaded to madness by the pike points.

"Fall back there," roared Heathcote to the cavalry, "and prepare to charge!"

A crashing volley screamed from the loyalist line, but the pounding hoofs deadened it, and as if borne forward on the wings of smoke-wreath and dust-cloud, a herd of furious Wexford cattle burst against the troops at the Gate, so that they reeled back stabbing at the frantic beasts, while through the pearly grey of rifle-smoke and the tawny haze of dust thundered the hoarse shout of the terrible pikemen.

At intervals a beast fell, shot instantly, but the others sped on with lowered heads, and many a yeoman was sent flying into the air to fall across the backs of the plunging steers and be trampled the next moment into jelly as the drove surged on past the Gate.

"Charge!" shouted Heathcote.

"The horses won't do it, sir!" yelled a sergeant. "Get 'em back a bit—Ah, God!" And at the word, his rearing mare dropped, gored horribly by the horns of a frenzied bull.

"Back the horses, then, and kick their brains out!" roared the soldier, but in vain. A few of the troopers

endeavoured to obey, but the half-trained steeds of the yeomen plunging madly, broke their ranks, running hither and thither, snorting in an agony of fear amid that infernal din, for now the pikemen had gained the Gate and many a maid and many a ruined hearth was being well avenged at every flaming second of the fight.

"To the bridge!" shouted a horseman at Heathcote's bridle rein, "Captain Snowe's orders."

A bullet hummed past the officer's ear, and the messenger sank in his saddle, shot through the head. Heathcote glanced round, a puff of smoke was breaking from a neighbouring window, the townspeople were not all loyalists.

"Right about face," he commanded, hearing dully as he went the doors of shops and private dwellings being swung open so that the yeomen might take refuge within, while here and there, jets of flame were darting from behind shutters, and the troops were beginning to look apprehensively over their shoulders as now and again, a comrade dropped under the fire of a concealed foe.

At the bridge the fight raged fiercely, the North Corks firing rapidly though badly galled by the insurgent marksmen who had won the island in a desperate attack upon their position. There was firing too at Templeshannon, where the yeomen were sturdily repelling a well-sustained attack, and other smoke than that of gunpowder drifting towards the cavalry line from distant Drumgoole, and ere long from Templeshannon itself, the smoke of blazing thatch and rafter, the inmates having fired their houses with their own hands in order to further embarrass their hated foes.

Minute by minute the confusion increased, as the assailants pushed steadily forward on every side, the snap and snarl of musketry crackling incessantly all along the little town to the Duffrey Gate where the insurgents stormed furiously despite the stubborn fight of the yeomen

under Pounden who occupying the houses in the vicinity, beat back their headlong advance.

But the people were by this firing from the windows indiscriminately, for many rifles had been snatched from the streets, and the troops galled on different sides, began to suffer; then high above the din of battle rose a triumphant cheer, the last defenders had been hurled from the wall and the Gate was taken—the doors of the houses where the loyalist yeomen had sought refuge now splintering beneath awful blows of axe and sledge-hammer.

The cavalry advanced at a canter across the bridge and was just in time to cover the retreat of some soldiers hard pressed by riflemen whom the horse instantly charged, driving them in confusion upon the head of another column which they scattered, the yeomen cheering as they reformed, the people along the route darting from their houses to pull the wounded men within, and open a desultory fire with their guns from the windows as the troopers waving their dripping swords, trotted past.

Again the insurgents advanced dauntlessly, stooping and firing with deadly effect, the yeomen replying with sharp volleys which told not only on the marksmen but also on the column of pikemen stepping forward always and watching for the moment when the troops should retreat again. Once more the cavalry charged, driving them back by short rushes, but yet they came on along the neighbouring lanes, through the houses and the yards, now creeping over the low roofs, now bounding along the wall-copings, sometimes falling under the fire of the military, but always advancing, and always when the surge of each charge had passed found in possession of some new point of vantage whence they could gall their foe now sullenly giving way, step by step, until the bridge was reached.

Even during his brief absence, Heathcote noted how the tide of fight had turned, Templeshannon across the river was blazing fiercely and from the quays the sluggish

smoke-clouds coiled upward in thick masses to sink again on the quiet air and roll their dark wreaths slowly overhead, nearer and nearer until the very streets were arched by the stifling folds, and the sweating infantry retired, the absurd fur of their helmets actually singed by the flames as they doggedly contested street by street, while all along the wooded banks of the Slaney jets of flame were glancing and globes of grey smoke shredding away among the young May leaves, the insurgents now considerably reinforced, closing gradually on the gasping North Cork still holding the bridge with desperate courage.

"We fight in the shade;" laughed Heathcote to an officer who with a small contingent was pushing past the cavalry line, "how goes the day?"

"Damned badly!" replied the other, wiping his powder-blackened face, "they are coming in on every side, if they did it first we could not have kept the place an hour. Phew, I'd give a guinea for a drink from Shiel's Well—Ah."

A shot flashed from a neighbouring house, and he fell.

"Ecod, Denny the apothecary, is dealing in leaden pills, like the rest of us!" growled a Captain Drury who had just come up. "Well, there is this to be said in favour of 'em, you don't require a second dose. Don't they fight like devils? I have been in the American war, and I never experienced a better fire, sir, their swiftness and aim are wonderful."

The town itself was by this on fire, a lane in the middle belching fire and smoke over the streets dotted with writhing forms or encumbered by furniture pulled from the houses and swept by riderless horses rushing madly through the storm of musketry.

The island on the Slaney was sprinkled with dead and dying men witnesses to the excellent aim of the yeomen on the bridge who nevertheless suffered heavily as the minutes went by under a galling fusilade renewed by fresh reinforcements, shrill cries of encouragement coming from

parties of women who moved recklessly amid the hail of death with whisky kegs slung on their shoulders to revive the wearied men who had fought and marched and countermarched since noon the day before

Through the town darkened by the musket and burning thatch, the victorious insurgents pressed on, though checked by rushes of cavalry covering the slow retreat of the troops falling back on every hand to the market-place, where they formed once more, and a hasty council was held. It was not marked by lengthened deliberation, for through the flaming streets came flying the last defenders of the Duffrey Gate, having left their officers dead under the advancing flood of peasantry, and down from the northern side roared fresh pikemen led by Sinnot of Kilbride.

Once more the entire cavalry available was ordered to charge and along the curving ways they galloped madly, driving back the pikemen who had pressed forward in too disorderly a manner, but took refuge in the houses under shelter of the fire of their friends, or actually met the horsemen hand to hand, the fight raging horridly all through the street and across the bridge until the long-drawn notes of the "retreat" bade the wearied cavalry retire amid crowds of townspeople rushing bare-headed into streets beseeching the soldiers not to desert them!

This sight recalled the thought of Irene and her aunt to Heathcote's mind. Ordering two riderless horses to be caught, he pushed forward with a few troopers and reached their lodging by a circuitous route, the raving of the flames, the patter of musketry and the awful shrieks of terror or of triumph making a din in which no orders could be heard.

Pushing through a little knot of Orangemen retiring like the hangdog cowards they were from an ineffectual attack upon the castle where some hated Papist prisoners had been immured, he beat at the door vehemently.

It opened instantly, the two women needing no ex-

planation, and climbing breathlessly on the backs of the spare chargers. A few hurried words of thanks, a hand waved from the window, and they were gone, threading the winding streets swarming with wailing women, some carrying children at their breasts, some on their shoulders, their men folk staggering along under the weight of whatever they deemed sufficiently valuable to justify removal. One man who seemed to have lost his wits, carrying a hall-clock whose imperturbable face told the hour of four until a stray bullet shattered it, thus obliging its owner to continue his flight without further admonition as to the flight of Time.

A little further on Handcock, the minister, and his wife, were running to and fro among the fugitives, begging aid from their terrified parishioners, who fearing the vengeance of the tortured peasants on their account, paid little heed. The terrified woman sprang at Irene's bridle-rein, but Heathcote pushed his horse between.

"I conceive, madam," he said with asperity, "that a minister's wife should have no fear of any section of Christians."

"Oh, Major," she panted, "a horse, a horse, for the love of heaven, you don't know what's in the room above!"

"Aha, but we do!" yelled a venomous voice from an attic window, "and by heaven you'll pay for it!"

"Here, madam, get on mine!" shouted Macdonough, "ye didn't desert us, and by J——s we won't desert ye!"

In another moment Heathcote and his charges were swept into the retiring crowd where cavalry and infantry were inextricably entangled amid a maze of lumbering carts and over-crowded vehicles; many women rode, the yeomen manfully giving up their horses to the weeping ladies who would have been safer in the town than in the heart of that terrible stampede.

On rattled the tide of headlong flight out upon the Wexford road, a thickly flowing stream of terrified

humanity canopied by a cloud of dust yellowing in the rays of the westering sun, only comparatively few taking to the fields because of the frequent fences, until in sheer dread of losing their lives under the wheels of the flying cars numbers of women poured over the high banks and ran along the river side, a pitiful sight, seeking for fords, and soon they could be seen wading through the Slaney water, one wailing child at the breast, another clinging to the back, *en route* for St John's. Overhead towered a giant column of pitchy smoke wavering into the exquisite blue of the evening sky, bearing to straining eyes in Wexford town its tale of disaster and defeat before even the first puff of the rolling dust storm travelling thither by the Slaney banks.

Into Enniscorthy poured the victorious insurgents, the rattle of musketry dying fitfully away amid tumultuous cheers of victory.

"That was a grand idea of yours, Father John," said Sinnot, laughing as he pointed to one of the steers lying dead in the channel, "the men will not want for beef."

"Much good may it do them," replied the priest, endeavouring to restore shape to his powder-burned hat, "it's not often they get it, poor fellows, but the thought was not so original after all; surely that gentleman who built the castle yonder did the self-same thing at Waterford—there's nothing new under the sun, Tom. Oh heavens!"

A raving yell of execration which had swelled above the clamour, now burst forth with redoubled fury, and from Handcock's house came a party bearing on a shutter the body of a man dressed in yeoman uniform, a severed rope trailing from the twisted neck.

"They hanged him!" screamed a woman clapping her hands in an agony of angry grief, "because he wouldn't flog the people. Oh the poor drummer bye—sure I knew him well!"

"Burn down the murdering thief's house, since we

can't catch himself!" roared the crowd, and in less time than it takes to tell Enniscorthy church was attacked, the furniture hurled forth, piled up and set on fire; some even mounting to the belfry and taking down the bell which was to ring a note of war-like preparation for many a day from the summit of Vinegar Hill where now a green flag was fluttering above the veering clouds of battle smoke.

To and fro rode Father John with the other leaders, advising, exhorting, striving as far as in him lay to check other sudden ebullitions of rage which burst forth from time to time as here and there some torturer of his countrymen was dragged from his lurking place and piked or shot on the instant. His task was not easy, but at length he succeeded in dispersing the furious men through the streets to seek refreshments or assist in extinguishing the burning buildings, and so amid tears and laughter, rejoicing and lamentation, blessing and curses fell the first night of the first day of liberty in Enniscorthy town.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Heathcote and the two jaded women reached Wexford they found they had only exchanged one scene of confusion for another a thousand times more chaotic, the streets being filled with the females who had followed the North Cork thither, their shrieks of lamentation clamouring upon the evening air as the dust-smothered survivors of Enniscorthy came stumbling across the New Bridge and gasped out their story.

Acting on instinct, the Orange yeomen of the garrison rushed to the goal with the intention of murdering the prisoners immured there a day or two before, a Mr Harvey of Bargy Castle, Mr Fitzgerald of New Park, and Mr Colclough of Ballyteigue. Foiled by the fidelity of the gaoler, who like his comrade at Enniscorthy, took precautions, they began to parade the streets, a scabrous mass of red-coated rascality, howling for croppy blood, adding thus a new element to the awful tumult babbling along the bridge and roaring through the shuddering town.

Heathcote who was wearied out, would have experienced great difficulty in providing lodgings if a white-haired gentleman who introduced himself as Captain Keough, had not offered the use of a room at his house in George's Street where his wife, a beautiful young woman, received the ladies with a hospitality as gracious as it was kindly. Thus relieved, the dragoon saw to the quartering of his few troopers, and then staggered off to seek needed repose amid the riot which continued intermittently through the night.

Morning brought no brighter augury, the shrill raving of women rising once more as the bodies of those who

fell at Oulart were carried in, the gashed and blood-stained forms a silent presage for their comrades who, with white lips that belied the swaggering oaths they uttered, vowed revenge. Neither was confidence restored by the various detachments arriving hourly—the Heathfield and Taghmon cavalry, the Meath and Donegal militias, the latter corps under the command of Colonel Maxwell sent by General Fawcett from Duncannon Fort.

Heathcote, who had offered his services, made an inspection of the place and its defences which struck him as tenable, and seeing how formidable the preparations were, he found it difficult to understand the signs of panic already abundantly manifest. He mentioned this to Lieutenant Colonel Watson, a gentleman who had also volunteered; the latter smiled contemptuously.

"These yeomen are hardly intended for fighting," he remarked dryly, "we should be better in their absence, but they will not leave the town without the protection of the military."

"Then you contemplate evacuating the position because of a gang of ruffianly women-torturers?" cried Heathcote.

The older man laughed. "It may come to that," he replied, "the Mayor has sent a gentleman of this town, a Mr Sutton, to Fawcett for fresh reinforcements, but we shall try a little diplomacy first. They are about despatching a deputation to the rebels at Enniscorthy, that fellow, Jacob, and the Boyds are keen about it, they purpose sending some of the prisoners at the gaol on the errand."

"Good God!" exclaimed Heathcote.

"Oh, I assure you the white-livered runagates think it a stroke of deep policy," rejoined the soldier, taking a pinch of snuff. "They are congratulating themselves because their men did not kill 'em yesterday. By the way, you had better wait on the gentlemen too, and see that our friends do not show their hands hopelessly."

Shrugging his shoulders, Heathcote turned away, and ere long found himself with half a dozen others in a large room at the gaol, before three persons who although prisoners, sat at a table where pistols were displayed. Nor was this the only incongruous element in the scene, the deputation, headed by a clergyman named Hay, approaching the subject of the visit with a fawning civility which made Heathcote wish he had not come, and deepened the looks of contemptuous distrust on the faces of the other men.

"We ventured to call on you, gentlemen," began the minister, when he had introduced the embassy with much formality, "concerning a matter which you have, I doubt not, at heart as much as we ourselves—the peace of this Kingdom. And—er—we are—er—knowing the influence you possess—most innocently and most deservedly we are sure—over those misguided people, we come to propose that you would be kind enough to—to go to them, and bid them lay down their arms, and—er—go home for the present. You may assure them of free pardon, and oblivion and speedy restitution of everything they seek, and so forth."

"On whose authority shall we speak?" asked one of the prisoners.

"Oh, I do not think they will mind asking you," answered Mr Boyd, a magistrate. "All we want is to get 'em away from the town, they may come here you know. We are not quite prepared to stand a siege—and then the carnage."

"What a pity you did not think of that a few weeks ago, Boyd!" remarked Mr Colclough, "when you were questioning and flogging and playing the devil all over the barony."

"We are only the humble instruments of Government," replied the latter, "Government knows that a hideous conspiracy had been in existence——"

"Government knew it all along, sir!" cried one of the

prisoners warmly, "but Government has been conveniently blind."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," rejoined the magistrate, "it is only quite recently they learned the full extent of the awful plot."

"Pshaw!" retorted the gentleman who had spoken first. "Did not Clonmel go to the Castle and tell the lot there that as they knew the conspiracy was on foot, it was illegal not to take steps to crush it, and was he not told to mind his own business?"

"Yes," exclaimed Mr Harvey, "and how is it that some of my tenants found arms hidden in the thatch of their houses, and not hidden by croppies, but by those whom you and I know well, Mr Boyd?"

To this Mr Boyd and the other delegates offered energetic disclaimers, justice would be done—if such miscreants existed, which they doubted for the sake of human nature; why did not Mr Harvey lodge an affidavit? And so on in a strain of stupid contradictory phrases whose insincerity would have been patent to even the intelligence of the howling Orangemen in the street outside.

"May I ask, gentlemen, on what charge are you detained here?" asked Heathcote, during a pause in the resulting discussion.

"Faith you may, sir," replied Mr Harvey, "but we are the last people in the world to give you an answer. I was arrested a day or two ago without rhyme or reason, bundled in here, and would be a dead man by this if Gladwin the gaoler had not locked us in and given us wherewith to defend ourselves. Egad, I am beginning to think that a prison is the safest as well as the most honourable place a man can be in those times."

"My house was ransacked," remarked another, of commanding presence, to whom he had been presented as Mr Fitzgerald of New Park. "I was arrested on Saturday evening and brought thither, though Mr Turner

had been at my place all day, receiving pikes from the people, and issuing protections. My captors, however, did not think it worth while to bring away the weapons, and for aught I know they may be in hostile hands by this."

"You ask us why we are here, sir," said another, Mr Colclough, "I shall tell you, because we are not hated by our neighbours, because we are not Orangemen, because we *are* gentlemen—and one of us a Catholic! And you know that as well as any man in the ship, Mr Hay."

"Well, well," replied the minister, "we can discuss that at another time; what all loyal men should wish for is a speedy restoration of peace, and all should have sufficient fortitude to—to——"

"Put their own necks in the halter for the general good? Ha! ha!" laughed Mr Harvey. "Very well; but why did you not get Mr Boyd yonder, or Mr Jacobs here, they are loyal, there is no doubt of that?"

"Ah, Mr Harvey," expostulated the pastor, "these gentlemen have other duties to discharge, they wait on you at considerable inconvenience, and they are quite as anxious as you are——"

The three gentlemen laughed contemptuously. "Much more," said Mr Fitzgerald, "their anxiety is written on their faces."

"Sir, if they be anxious," responded the minister adroitly, "it is solely on your account, they do not wish to have your blood upon their heads—Listen to that!"

A hoarse yell rose from the street, Heathcote went to the window. The place was filled with a tumultuous mob of armed men most of whom wore orange favours, and spat up at the casement in motiveless rage as they marched past. Striding downstairs, the officer pushed through the frenzied mass, and hastening to the cavalry station, summoned the few troopers who had accompanied him from Enniscorthy, and rode down the street at a quick trot, the

mass of dastards slinking away at the sight of the swords and helmets.

When he returned to the council chamber he found the prisoners were to be given their freedom on an individual bail of £1000, and £500 from each of the other gentlemen present.

Fitzgerald and Colclough were moving towards the door when he came in. "I thank you, sir," said the former, shaking hands, "I regret that I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance at an earlier date. You are an Englishman, and I doubt not a brave one; accept in return for your courtesy this advice: Go home as soon as possible, if you have regard for your own character, because, Major Heathcote, any Englishman who comes to Ireland and stays there long enough, becomes either a rogue or a rebel."

And mounting their horses, the gentlemen rode off, Heathcote and his cavalry escorted them a little way past the town through a street where men were busy stripping thatch from some women's houses amid the sobs of their owners who displayed a want of public spirit distinctly feminine.

The day passed quickly in strenuous preparations, and Heathcote snatched a few moments with difficulty to visit Captain Keough's house where he met Doctor Troy, the Catholic bishop whose loyal effusions may be read in the Castlereagh correspondence, and was himself in considerable dread of the pikemen. The evening brought Mr Colclough, who riding to the Bull Ring, coolly announced to the anxious enquirers that the rebels had refused all overtures.

"Just what I expected," said Captain Keough, who with Heathcote, was standing a little apart from the crowd, "they would be mad not to see their chance."

"Aye, that is exactly what they did," observed Mr Colclough. "When we arrived they were at sixes and sevens, some of them were on the point of running home,

as Barker of Enniscorthy told me, 'But, egad,' says he, 'ye have set the ball rolling again and no mistake!' They would not allow Fitzgerald to return."

"Are you staying in the town?" asked Snowe who jus came up.

Mr Colclough laughed, and glanced at the murmuring crowd. "No, faith," he replied, "I don't half like the protection I am likely to get. Every man for himself, I'll get home and see my wife, now I've done my errand. God grant the house will not be burnt before me!"

At this moment there was confusion caused by drunken yeomen who were being ejected from the Cape of Good Hope opposite, and Heathcote looking idly round, noted a man with a heavy welt of flesh upon his dark face, pulled out a watch somewhat ostentatiously. Darting forward, the soldier caught his wrist.

"Where did you get this?" he asked sternly. The other strove to free himself, but vainly.

"I bought it." He growled sullenly.

"You lie, you stole it, it is mine!" said Heathcote. "Here, guard!"

"What's that fellow saying to you, Andy?" shouted another yeoman, "give him a dig in the lip!—Leave me go, Harrigan!"

At the name, Heathcote let his prisoner escape, and faced round. The speaker, a low-sized ruffian, was in the grasp of another whom he instantly recognised as the man who had stopped him on the Enniscorthy road a few evenings before.

"Can you, sirrah, explain how your comrade has got my property?" said Heathcote thickly.

Harrigan's face paled a moment; the other two began to laugh insolently. "No; I'm damned if I can!" he retorted after a slight pause. "What the Hell is it to me —there's a good deal of property changing hands these times, and the King's servants get a little of what's going, ha'pence as well as kicks."

"Is not your name Harrigan?" cried Heathcote, recollecting Kitty Creagh.

"It is! What have you to say to it? Who are you, curse you? Where is your commission to knock people about?"

Heathcote's answer was to dash his gauntleted fist in the other's face with such sudden fury that the rascal reeled; and then snatching a whip from Keough, he belaboured him ere he could recover himself. For an instant it seemed as if the others would attack, but the soldier's glance cowed them, and Harrigan, passing his hand across his brow, shouted to them to desist.

"Leave him to me!" he yelled. "A blow is a note drawn at sight!"

"To be renewed at will?" sneered the officer, as a bullet fired by Harrigan whistled past his ear, and the spy fell back amid the mob which closed up immediately.

"Do you know anything about that ruffian?" asked Heathcote, returning the whip to Keough.

"I do," replied the latter quietly. "He brought the news of the taking of the Hermitage to Wexford, having slipped out before the rebels stormed the place."

"I shall have him punished for attempting my life," said the officer. "I wish to know more about him, for other reasons—he looks like a soldier."

"So the thief is or was," replied Keough. "Watson recognised him some time ago here in Wexford as a deserter and a thief, and on inquiry it was found that he had been in many regiments, infantry and cavalry, egad."

"You had him arrested?"

"Of course, but what came of it? He laughed at us, by G—d, and showed a paper of which I cannot speak at large, granting a pardon for past misdeeds in consideration for services rendered to Government, and signed by my Lord Carhampton. If you take my advice, you will have nothing further to do with him; it is a dangerous class—

King's man to-day, rebel to-morrow, as the cat jumps—you understand?"

"I do not," replied the soldier shortly, "but I was robbed of this watch and my pocket-book containing private memoranda a few evenings ago; I suspect this fellow was one of the gang, though I cannot prove anything——"

"Very possibly he was," remarked Keough calmly. "You are in the Ninth Dragoons, are you not, sir?"

"Yes, lately appointed," replied Heathcote. "What has that to do with it?"

"A good deal, perhaps," answered the other, taking his sleeve and drawing him away. "That is one of the very regiments this rogue honoured. You are also an inspector?"

Heathcote nodded.

"Well," pursued Keough, "you have been talked about in military circles here, I can tell you, and the probability is that your pocket-book contained some memoranda or other which—let us say certain persons—did not want published in the war office. Now?"

"They dare not," said Heathcote; "it is the King's commission."

"A damned deal they care!" rejoined Keough. "Why, man, you don't know anything about the government of Ireland! It is a huge family party, and they will all pull the one way, and stop at nothing to remove what opposes them. Do you think they will spare Lord Edward, their relative? Not they! And who are you, sir? Major Heathcote from England, ha, ha. An honest man, and all is said. I tell you it is money, money, money," continued Keough, speaking in the low, concentrated tone men still use in talking of such topics in Ireland. "Money and honours—God save the mark! And all the while their unfortunate country bound hand and foot and sold. Oh, my God, I sometimes wonder if they ever stop to think! Did you hear what Colclough said to-day

about Clonmel? Do you remember what Fitzgerald said? Go home as soon as you can, Major. Hush! Well, King, how are matters going?"

"Badly," replied that gentleman with many emphasising oaths; "they are in a perfect sweat of terror, and the women are driving 'em mad. That damned procession of corpses through the streets to-day has taken the edge off their valour. Christ! how ghastly those pikes are!"

"Pshaw, they think too much about them," said Heathcote. "What are they after all, but poles with knives atop."

"Aye," answered King, "and what are guns but only pieces of hollow iron fixed on wood, and cannon the same —only more so. Everything is nothing, if you look at it that way."

"I strongly suspect that the men behind have a good deal to say to it," rejoined the soldier.

"That is quite true," remarked Snowe, who had joined the group; "the town's fit to stand a siege, but we cannot trust those skulking hounds; they are like hens on hot griddles all day long, trotting from pillar to post. Maxwell is going to Windmill Hill, I hear, and Fawcett will march from Duncannon."

"Neither will want company," said Captain Keough, pointing to a star of light which had just begun to glow upon the dusky brow of the Forth Mountains; "that is a rebel watch-fire."

"Well, they mean business?" asked King, addressing Mr Colclough, as they encountered that gentleman again, picking his way through the streets.

"You may depend upon it!" he replied, glancing at the mountain. "Yonder must be their advance guard, so you may understand they do not mean to let the grass grow under their feet. "I've been to see poor Harvey; I hope the rascals here will not murder him."

"Oh, we'll see to that," replied Snowe; "once we have a regular force. As for the rebels, they are mere sheep;

their conduct to-day shows they have no fixed plan, consequently they must be beaten in the long-run."

"Perhaps, but I should wish that it were a shorter one than that which ye had yesterday," answered Colclough, rising in his stirrups. And with an awkward laugh at the somewhat inopportune pleasantry, the others moved away to their various posts, to order as best they might their wavering commands.

CHAPTER XVII

THE short summer night in that fear-ridden town seemed to Heathcote the longest he had ever known.

Making his rounds, he passed Keough's house once or twice, and looking up at the windows of the room which the ladies occupied, saw Irene's figure flit across the blind, Miss Prue having caught a chill from the fatigues of the preceding day. A sudden heart-sickness came upon him, his mission was a failure, he had no real command here, no real obligation to fulfil, he was wealthy, there were ships at the quay and England within a few days' sail, Keough's words came back, and the dread of an inglorious death amid those squalid quarrels unnerved him like a physical weakness, so that he actually took a step towards the house, then he checked himself.

"Egad, I am a fool," he muttered, "living with cowards has made me fanciful. How do I know whether this girl yonder, cares, and if she does, what a poltroon would she think me. Death, pshaw, 'tis a soldier's risk, and a bargain is not a grumble. Would God I had stayed in London."

As day dawned, heavy whiffs of tar-laden smoke clouds poured along the streets near the bridge, and soon its half-mile structure and the "Chinese railings" were threatened by a fire at the farther end, which crackled about the great piers of American oak, little spirals of flame dancing on foot-board and hand-rail over their reflections in the shallows of the Slaney, while from attic windows pale-cheeked Wexford belles sighed for the endangered promenade, and mounted men came spurring into the town with the news that at Ferrybank, across the river, a hostile force was halted.

"Fawcett should have been here before now," said Watson, a little later, "I expected he would have reached the town this morning."

"Egad," observed Heathcote, lowering his glass and pointing in the direction of the mountain called Three Rocks, "he may have stopped close by, there must be a heavy force encamped up yonder, I can see their banners all along the line of march."

"Quite possible," replied the veteran. "A sortie may divide their attention, we should have some men available."

"We have plenty of men," laughed Heathcote, "but whether they are available, is more than I can say."

"Well, we shall prove it," replied the other, "after breakfast see that the companies we inspected yesterday are paraded, we'll march out and make a reconnaissance; bring your dragoons and the Taghmon cavalry."

When the little party reached Windmill Hill they found Maxwell in consultation with two officers who reported that Captain Adams with over a hundred men in charge of two howitzers had been intercepted at Three Rocks, and the cannon taken.

An immediate advance was determined on, and the force under Maxwell, some three hundred, set out. The march, despite Watson's impatience, was conducted with extreme caution, and ere long the yeomen forming the advance guard gradually fell back, the infantry halting also despite the not over-zealous exhortation of their officers to press on.

"For God's sake what's the matter?" cried Watson whose temper was sorely tried, addressing the officer in charge, the gallant Trimmins who had escaped from the Hermitage with some others, and was now acting as sergeant to the Taghmons.

"Plaze, sir, there's not much the matter," replied that warrior, saluting elaborately. "But it's not easy to see with all them bushes and ditches, and we noticed a man on a fence with a white flag, watching most suspicious."

The veteran's eye darkened, he dared not speak his mind in the presence of those frightened and sulky faces. "Come on then," he said simply, "and we shall hear what this fellow on the fence has to say for himself. Oho, they have guns. Deploy, Captain Jacobs; come on now, and clear the road!"

As he advanced he felt convinced that the man on the fence was a humane fiction, and resolved to shame his faltering command, he trotted forward more briskly, forgetting that the virtue to which he appealed had, like her sister, Courage, long since abandoned the cowards slinking behind. In the distance he could see clumps of men drawn up in some kind of military array, but in the immediate vicinity the way was clear.

Suddenly a shot rang sharply out from a little tuft of golden furze, and the breeze brought the perturbing odour of gunpowder to the yeoman column stepping on under the contemptuous curses of Heathcote's dragoons. Then a white, fluffy globe of pearl-grey smoke appeared silently on an eminence, followed by a dull report, and a cannon ball ploughed a deep furrow along a rush-grown field bordering the road. There was a shrill, harsh cheer, a rattle of rifle shots from other knots of gorse, and Watson's riderless charger dashed past.

Unable to see because of the advance guard halted in confusion, the infantry stopped again, a fierce brattle of musketry lengthening on their ears; the Donegals who had fallen into line, were replying. Then came a rush of feet along the rocky road, with the yell that drives home a charge, and above it another dull roar as a second projectile crashed into the broken ranks.

"Deploy," roared Heathcote, "take to the flanking fences there, and leave the road free. Curse them, they are driving horses down the road! Cavalry prepare to charge!"

"Cavalry prepare to run!" bawled a lantern-jawed corporal of the North Cork, as climbing a fence, he

rapidly made for the town, and ere Heathcote could speak again the Taghmons clattered after him.

There was another volley from the ambuscade, and all along the road a roar of fight, the Donegals guessing how matters were, making a desperate effort to cover the confusion as the main column broke and ran with a unanimity and precision which would have been highly commendable had the movement been in another direction.

The affair was so ludicrous, so pitifully contemptible, that realizing his absolute uselessness he gave the order to retire, just in time to escape a flood of shattered ranks surging around the horses' quarters. The retreat was conducted for a while with some appearance of regularity owing to the courage of the Donegal troops, whom Heathcote when he reached opener ground, allowed to precede the cavalry, and presently they re-entered the clamouring town whose streets were thronged with crowds of men rushing hither and thither in a paroxysm of nervous excitement, and Captain Boyd who was pushing through the people, caught Heathcote's bridle.

"This is the devil's own business!" he exclaimed, "the latest is that Fawcett has gone back to Duncannon. So the guns were lost?"

"Oh, we know where they are," laughed the soldier, "we had a brush with 'em just now."

"Yes, yes, the horses ran off with the limber—or something," continued the other hastily. "I'm going now to the prison to get Harvey to carry a message to the Three Rocks for us. You had better come too—he may be afraid."

Wondering what use he could be, Heathcote turned his horse's head, and dismissing the dragoons, returned to the prison where they were joined by Captain Keough and some other gentlemen. Pushing through the mob of riotous yeomen who had again returned to attack the gaol, they reached the room where they had held the discussion the day before. It was apparently empty.

"God grant they did not kill him!" said Boyd piously, "It will be a blue look-out for us if they did!"

"Try in the other rooms," said Keough, "wasn't he here, Gladwin?"

"Yes, sir, only a minute ago, I'd swear," replied that functionary, scratching his head as he preceded them to the door. "But maybe he found some other room more convenient; of course I hadn't him under lock and key."

A search was now commenced, and the deputation went solemnly over the prison in single file, exclaiming in unison —"Mr Harvey, Mr Harvey! Are you there, sir? Come out, nothing will be done to you!" But only the empty passages and walls returned the polite invocation which was sometimes hardly audible through the howls of the Orange mob without.

"Piggy, piggy, come and be killed!" whispered Keough to Heathcote who was looking on with a grim smile.

Presently the deputation returned, a little paler.

"Where can he be?" said Jacobs thoughtfully, looking under the table, "He can't be on the roof and he isn't downstairs."

An unmistakably human sneeze echoed through the apartment, and the clean tiles about the empty fire-place were deluged by a flood of crumbling mortar.

"By the powers he's up the chimney, it's exactly where I would go myself—if I hadn't arms," said Jacobs.

Mr Hay went to the chimney and tried to peer up, but came back rubbing an eye.

"Mr Harvey, sir," he said addressing the wall, "be under no apprehensions, there is no—ahem—immediate danger," he added, for the yells from the street were painfully audible. "We are here to protect you, please come down, this is no time for jesting—Ah, good heavens!"

The gentlemanly appeal was cut short by a rumbling rush of mortar, a hearty curse, and a leg appeared pawing the air pathetically until a good Samaritan guided it to the hob, and presently Mr Harvey stood before the

deputation, his wig awry, his clothes in unpicturesque disorder, an eye partially closed and a streak of soot decorating one cheek.

"Mr Harvey," began the minister, whose professional practice taught him to preserve his composure in the face of greater absurdities, "we have come to wait upon you."

Mr Harvey did not immediately reply. He was vigorously rubbing one eye and glaring at the embassy with the other in a distinctly hostile fashion.

"We have come to make a proposition," continued the clergyman, "proposition—ahem——"

"Yes, Mr Harvey," laughed Heathcote, "First Book, fifth proposition!"

"Ecod, you are right!" answered Harvey. "Pons Asinorum! Egad, you are like to beat Euclid out of the field if you go on thus, gentlemen. Nothing but propositions. A pretty 'pons' you have made of it, by the way," he added, turning to Keough. "So the bridge was burned by the clumsy cowards? There's five hundred of my money gone in smoke!"

"Aye, and some of mine too," replied Keough, "I am afraid it was a bad investment, Mr Harvey. It walked the plank."

"Faith, I believe you," said a Captain Bourke of the North Cork, "and the devil of it is the ladies won't have any plank to walk on now, to keep appointments, the darlings."

"The ladies have other things to think of, and so have their relatives," observed Mr Hay impatiently. "We came, Mr Harvey—is the eye all right, sir?—Yes? We came to know if you would be——"

"Public-spirited enough," suggested Heathcote seriously.

"Thank you—public-spirited enough to go to the rebels at the Fourth Rocks. No, the Three Rocks—on the Forth Mountains—you know what I mean?"

"I do not!" said Mr Harvey sturdily, "and what is more, I do not want to understand you, Mr Hay, because

if you imagine I shall run messages for you, you are very much mistaken. I do not like to refuse a clergyman a polite request, but I am not an open flaring fool, and all the fine flummery in the world will not make me alter my decision. That I tell you flat."

"If you were a fool, sir, do you think we would come here to ask your help in this difficult and dangerous situation?" asked Mr Hay submissively.

"You would," replied Mr Harvey uncompromisingly.

There was a short silence, outside, the yeomen were yelping, and through their clamour came the cries of tortured women. Then the deputation began to speak all together.

"Can't you get Doctor Troy, the Roman Catholic Archbishop or so?" sneered Mr Harvey, in a lull.

"Impossible," said Mr Hay, "he is here hiding from the pikemen himself; we could not allow the gentleman to risk his life, we are bound to protect him because all of his faith are not so."

"You are as full of Christianity as an egg is of meat," replied the captive. "But why don't you go yourself?"

"Now, Mr Harvey, surely you jest?" expostulated the minister. "Neither my position, nor—ahem—my profession would make me a *persona grata* to infidels and ignorant fanatics."

"If the gentleman be so tender about the Catholic bishop, *a fortiori* he should be more tender about himself," laughed Heathcote.

"I believe you!" cried Harvey. "Like the pilgrim and the peas, he'd wish to shift unpleasant responsibilities. But I tell you what I'll do, I'll write a letter to 'em, and you can get some other man of fortitude and discernment to carry it, amongst yourselves. Is not that fair?"

Seeing that there was no chance of making him alter his determination, the other gentlemen effusively agreed, and Mr Harvey who seems to have had considerable

faith in his epistolary powers, sat to the table, and penned a letter whose unconscious humour should alone render it historical. "I have been treated in prison with all possible humanity," he wrote. "To hell with the croppies!" yelled the crowd. "And am now at liberty," pursued Mr Harvey—"Good God!"

An enormous stone clattering between the bars outside the window crashed through to the floor, and the great door below resounded under a shower of like missiles. Mr Harvey carefully dried a blot on the paper and chose another quill. "Are there any prisoners here?" he asked.

"No, no, we let 'em go—didn't we, Gladwin?" cried Boyd.

"Yes, your honour," replied the gaoler, smiling.

"That's right, Gladwin," remarked Boyd. "Say something about it, Mr Harvey."

"I have procured the liberty of the prisoners," wrote the latter. "If you pretend to Christian charity, do not commit murder, or burn the property of the inhabitants, and spare your prisoners' lives."

A fresh discussion now arose as to who should take the message, each of the gentlemen present having some weighty but honourable reason for refusing. A yeoman of the guard at the door, named Doyle, volunteered, but being a Catholic, his services were dispensed with, and at length, two brothers, the Richards, were persuaded to bear it to the Three Rocks.

Sick of the scene he had witnessed, Heathcote swung out of the room, and went to Irene's lodgings to give the anxious women what comfort he could as well as snatch a hasty meal. The hours dragged slowly on, the disorder and confusion outside increasing, a babble of insane bestiality flooding the house with every puff of wind that lifted the blinds covering the windows lowered because of the heat, while every now and then the shriek of a woman and the flying rustle of her petticoats flitting by amid the filthy badinage could be heard. As if lashed

to frenzy by some invisible hand, hordes of sweating yeomen hurried to and fro, loaded with plunder from the adjacent houses, or yelling for the blood of the prisoners; a maddened, drunken herd of cowards, and over all the din, clear and menacing against the blue sky, soared the range of Forth where the two Richards were wrangling wearily with the insurgent leaders.

Suddenly a dull rumble shook the house, Heathcote springing to his feet, rushed into the street, and was almost knocked down by a man running in the opposite direction. He was clad in a ragged, frieze coat, his face besmeared with soot—it was King.

"Hullo, Major!" he shouted, "did you not know the game is up? Quick, throw away that sword and take those epaulets off!"

"What the devil do you mean?" said Heathcote, as a second report throbbed upon the air.

"The garrison's going," panted King, tucking his wig under his arm, "they have just blown up some powder they couldn't take away. Everybody is on the run, or hiding, sink me! There isn't a sewer drain in the damned place but lodges a loyal man quaking for his life, and all the women of the town are learning the Popish catechism. Stand back!"

Down the street swarmed a crowd of armed men clad in various uniforms from which the regimental badges had been removed, advancing with a stealthy, slinking step that threatened every moment to break into a run, even before they cleared the town.

"The North Cork mostly," said King, "they burnt their barracks before they went; they are making for Duncannon Fort, I'm with 'em. You had better throw away that sword."

"That sword was won in open fight from brave men, and is worn by one," retorted Heathcote coldly, "those epaulets were honourably won and honourably worn until now, when I part with them my life shall go too."

"Just as you please," answered the other, "steel and gimp, like fine sentiments, are cheap, though—Hah, Sparrow, where are you going?" he added, addressing another hurrying by.

"To the quay," replied the new-comer, glancing over his shoulder, "Boyd's brother told me he had got a ship."

"Don't be a damned fool," rejoined King, "come on to Duncannon, the rascals aboard the ship will bring her to directly they find the rebels have the town, pocket your coin into the bargain, and drink it to your good health when you are dancing on nothing for their amusement; they won't forget your tricks in Enniscorthy. Come with us, we'll protect you."

"Good warrant ye are, are ye not?" sneered the other passing on. "You can't protect yourselves. They have the Ballast Quay here, and by G—d if this goes on they'll have the Arms Quay too, with all the guns and swords ye are throwing in! No, damn me, I'll trust to the water!"

"Well, I don't think you will drown if there is any truth in proverbs," shouted King.

"Faith it's not hemp, but steel I have to fear," rejoined Sparrow.

"A devilish unpleasant reflection for you, Mr King," cried Heathcote, "especially as it is so cheap just now." And caught in another eddy of the flight, they were whirled apart.

The soldier stood aside and swore in impotent rage as the white-livered women-baiters raved down the narrow street, and thronged to every avenue of escape, the smoke from the burning barracks heavy on the air.

Shouldering forward again, after a pause, he was nearly swept off his feet by a plunging horse. He caught at the animal instinctively but the bridle was wrenched from his hand the next moment by a frenzied man in officer's uniform, though the epaulets were torn off and the gold

lace hung here and there in shreds from sleeve and breast. It was Boyd.

"They are coming!" he shouted, pointing in the direction of the bridge. "They'll be here in less than half-an-hour; the rascals at Ferry Bank smoked us, but the dogs at the mountain are holding consultation still. Ha, ha, was it not a good trick to fool 'em with that letter?"

"A soldier might think that to hold the town for the King would have been better," replied Heathcote shortly.

"Where did you learn strategy?" exclaimed Boyd. "Don't you know that this place does not mean anything? Look at those hills. It's of no consequence, it can't be held owing to circumstances—and our clear duty is to leave it. There is nothing I like less than running, myself——"

"Except standing," observed Heathcote, turning on his heel, "do not let me detain you."

"Well, yes," shamelessly replied the other, getting into the saddle. "But if you imagine we are afraid of the rebels you are very much mistaken. Look out for news, you'll hear how we made the croppy women pay for this on our march!" And he cantered away.

Heathcote went to the cavalry line, where he found his handful of troopers already in the saddles, the other cavalry corps being in full retreat. The horses which had brought Irene and Miss Prue were fresh and willing and supplied by this with suitable furniture. Giving the order to march, the soldier proceeded to Mr Keough's house. Miss Prue was assisted to mount by her host, Heathcote performing the same office for Irene, and her dear weight hung in his arms too sweet and too brief a moment. Then cloaks belonging to Mrs Keough, kindest and prettiest of dames, were strapped upon the cruppers, and the party went off, but had not advanced far when they were obliged to halt in order to allow a raving stream of redcoats, one moving mass of horrid blasphemy, to go by.

"Must we accompany those men?" asked Miss Prudence, to whom some compliments had been addressed.

"Egad, madam, I can hardly tell," answered Heathcote, backing Lightfoot so that her hind hoofs, which she lashed out, should keep the rascals at a civil distance. "I think it would be almost better to remain in the town."

"Yes—but the rebels!" cried Miss Prudence, "they will murder everyone who does not turn Papist, I am told."

Heathcote smiled. "I wonder whether there is any other station near?" he said as the party formed in a little by-street, and he dismounted to rearrange Irene's stirrup.

"I know of no place save New Ross," replied the elder lady.

"Aye, but that is 'cross country," answered the soldier, "I meant to have gone there, some of my regiment is quartered in the town. Do any of you happen to know the roads? I have only a dim recollection of those near——" He averted his eyes, for Irene's, full of sudden tears, sought his, and turning hastily, he questioned the men. As he expected, they were ignorant of the country.

"I know something of the roads thither," said Miss Prue, "and we might get there by the night, if all goes well; it would be much the best. Our family has some property in the place, a street being named after your dear father, Irene."

"What do you say?" asked Heathcote, turning to the girl.

"Whatever you think best, Ralph," she replied, laying her ungloved sun-kissed hand upon his as it rested on the pommel a moment.

The touch thrilled him with a sudden, swift emotion, he looked up into her face, and the sense of her beauty smote him as it had when she came towards him from the

house of woe by the quarry. He caught the little hand, and pressed it fervently.

When Pandora emptied her shallow box possibly Hope was not the only good thing which remained, for surely the pleasure which women give is one of the few blessings in a not too perfect world. It is so multiform, so subtle, so exquisite, that no son of man may go through life without finding once at least, its perfume blown across his path. And perhaps of all those charms, there is none to equal the frank, unstudied tendernesses of a gentlewoman.

"I shall do my best, my lady," said the soldier softly. "My poor fatherless girl," he added in a lower tone, "if the worst happens, you can but fall into the hands of brave men."

"And, Ralph," replied Irene, deliberately returning the pressure, "no woman in all God's world need fear such, as we well know."

To be praised by a woman is always sweet, indeed to be praised at all is not unbearable, but to be praised by a woman whom one loves and for whom one would die, is worth living for—which is saying a good deal.

With an effort Heathcote released his hand and looked round. The street was growing clearer now, and in the distance could be heard sharp, excited voices with new accents crossing each other. A compact body of men swung past a corner, took a turn to the right, and disappeared, they were the Donegals with Snowe. There was the unaccustomed music of women's laughter on the breeze, the laughter of Irishwomen, without the harlot snarl in the undertones. Just overhead a rope was flung across the street to the opposite house, and pulled in at an attic window. Heathcote looked up, and caught the sheen of a green silk flag which a pretty girl was making fast, and a moment later the colour was dancing above the street. He smiled, she laughed back, not unkindly; it was Kitty Creagh.

"Time to go, Major," she said, "though it would be

better if the ladies, poor things, stayed in the town, God be good to your father, Miss Irene, and bring you safe out of this moile."

Heathcote laughed, he scarcely knew why, and gave the order to march. The little party trotted smartly down a street by some half-completed earth-works, and struck out for the open country, making a detour to avoid a long stream of men canopied by dust through which their pike heads twinkled, running towards Wexford, and in the distance too they heard the clattering of brogues upon the planks with which the bridge had been repaired, cheer after cheer rising in regular diapason as the triumphant insurgents entered the abandoned town.

CHAPTER XVIII

Mr Gash prosecuted his journey at a pace which gradually became slower, and as he rode by the lovely Vale of Ovoca, yet to be made famous by a young poet then studying law in the Middle Temple, his thoughts were busy with the probability of being able to procure a fresh mount at high Rathdrum which he reached when the sun had sunk behind the towering crest of Lugnaquilla. This he found to be out of the question, all the available horses being impressed on military service, so perforce, he put up for the night at a tavern where he met some officers of the Fifth Dragoons who were full of their victorious achievements in the Devil's Glen where they had been engaged on the Devil's work, and proposing a game of cards, passed the evening profitably as well as pleasantly.

Next morning he learned that the horse would not be able to travel for at least some hours, and soon after made the more perturbing discovery that he must have left Heathcote's pocket-book either at Enniscorthy or Arklow.

At first he thought of returning on foot to the latter place, until reflection convinced him of his folly, and concluding philosophically that it was very unlikely to fall into its owner's hands, he occupied the time more wisely by re-reading and making some slight alterations in Neville's letter which he had brought from Malplaquet House. Later on a yeoman straggled into the village with the news of the defeat at Enniscorthy, and having got all the information possible out of the man, Mr Gash considerately made him drunk with the double purpose of taking his steed and bringing the message to Dublin himself; on examination, however, he ascertained that the

animal was in even a worse plight than his own, and so waited on impatiently until the hostler assured him that Rosinante was fit to carry him to Belfast.

His journey proved uneventful, and he reached Dublin after nightfall, meeting as he rode through the dimly lit streets with their flaunting night-walkers, another horseman, a Mr Connolly, who instantly began to talk about the state of the country about Celbridge, and of whom he made some polite inquiries concerning the health of his wife, without touching on the fact that her nephew was just then tossing on a prisoner's sick pallet at Newgate.

He went to the Castle straight, late as the hour was, with his letter, but finding that Lord Castlereagh had been summoned to a hastily convened council, departed, leaving the news of the taking of Enniscorthy.

Having seen to the stabling of his horse, he was proceeding up Werburg Street towards a hotel kept by a pretty woman, kept in turn by one of the Castle entourage, when a shower of water flung past him from a brilliantly-lit window crashed in the gutter, while a hoarse voice cried, "If you are a Protestant, I humbly ask your pardon, if you are a Papist, take it and be damned to you!"

Mr Gash laughed and looked up, the flood of light from the casement catching his face, and several other voices shouted, "Damn it all, it's Phil Gash! Come up, Gash, you son of w—— how the devil are you!"

Mr Gash considered a moment, and then with a shrug, turned to the door already opened by a giggling maid, with whom he took suitable liberties as they ascended the stairs to a room where several men and some women too were sitting amid a Homeric cloud of tobacco smoke. They were all evidently old friends, a few being officers who had actually been present on the night of Heathcote's arrival at Malplaquet, but who had since sought the capital.

"Well, my buck, it's good for sore eyes to see you!"

roared a jovial-faced personage who occupied the place of honour as he removed his long clay pipe and sent a volume of vapour to an artless shepherdess on the ceiling, who presided over the Arcadian revelry. "How are the rascally rebels behaving, and their croppy jades?"

"According to your policy, Mr Beresford, but hardly according to your wishes," replied Mr Gash, taking a chair at the table and keeping an eye on a florid dame mixing a brew from the capacious punch-bowl. "A little more lemon, please, Mrs Llewellyn. They are raising the dust finely."

"And the devil, I doubt not?" laughed a man opposite. "Well, we won't object if it helps us to raise the wind, eh?"

"I believe you, Mr Whaley," said Gash, "but it is you sharp blades up here in Dublin with the ear of the Lord Lieutenant who will have the gain."

The other endeavoured to look wise at far too short a notice, and collapsed with a hiccough. "Aye, but what about yourself?" he muttered. "What's all this going and coming? You're talked about, I assure you. Look here, Beresford," he continued, "you ought give Gash a house at Beresford Place, he'll be the most paying tenant you have—a vote merchant! Ha, ha."

"Then if you do," roared another, "you must shift the bank, or he'll break it!"

Mr Gash laughed, and turned to a lady whose likeness to Nellie Bird was most striking. "Good evening, Mrs Calf," he said, "I see that the troubles do not affect your complexion; Major Calf is well I trust?"

"Oh quite well, sir," simpered the dame. "He is at Chester now."

"Then he travels by easy stages to India—when last I saw you he was at Southampton?"

"Oh, Lard, how forgetful I am! I vow I meant to have said India and have done with it; of course he was at Southampton before."

"Oh, of course," answered Mr Gash, sympathetically. "Well, Mr Higgins, I trust those cut-throats have not deprived you of your sleep?"

"Not a wink!" replied the person addressed, his large red face looming through the smoke. "They talk and threaten, but Lord, I don't give the black of my nail for 'em. Beresford here knows how to strike terror into the ruffians!"

"Aye that he does," interrupted Whaley, "that Magee's the worst, but Lord, what a revenge he took on Clonmel for putting him in gaol! I'll never forget the Olympic Pig Races near poor Clonmel's place at Monkstown, with all the Dublin blackguards racing the bonives across the flower-beds—roses and geraniums and daffydowndillies, 'twas all one by G—d!"

"And every porker dressed up to represent some highly respectable person," observed one of the company slily.

"Pshaw, Newell, he's only got paper bullets, after all," said Higgins, who did not seem to relish the allusion. "They don't kill, or we'd be all dead by this, like thin-skinned John Edwin. Ha, ha! But talking about bullets, by the way, Ryan's not better I hear, but Swan will come round, Major Sirr says—he won't sing his last song yet a bit."

"Aye, that he will," cried the person addressed, a man with the eye of a bully. "I'd have been pretty well peppered, too, but that my coat is better than they knew of—as the player fellow says. It will go damned hard with the Chief of the Bear Tribe, ha, ha, if Ryan kicks the bucket. 'Twould amuse you, Gash, to see the way the Leinster set are running all over Dublin, making interest; and across the water it's the same. Madame Egalité's sent packing—brought pistols to the prison and proposed suicide—tragedy airs, less would her, God knows! But it won't happen again, two of Beresford's troop watching him always with swords drawn; Stone of the Derrys is on guard, too."

"A most appropriate name," said Mr Gash. "Soldiers are hardly fitted for that service; keepers from a private madhouse would do the work more quickly."

"That's true," hiccoughed another of the company, a man in scarlet. "We ain't good gaolers; we are too damned soft. Give us an enemy to face, and sink me, we go slap bang at him! But once he's conquered—ah, then the mother's milk gets the better of us, and we turn from men of war into cursed Samaritans!"

Gash glanced at the speaker, and, seeing that he was drunk enough to believe what he said, shook his head gravely.

"Yes, sink my eternal soul! That's where soldiers fail, though I can't say it of my own corps," cried Beresford. "Why, I am told that when O'Kelley called on Madame Egalité about the trouble, he began to cry, she had such an air with her."

"They say, poor soul, she was very ill at the time with her breast," observed Mrs Calf. "Behave yourself, Captain Meddlicott; look at Mr Gash, he's thinking of the young ladies he left in Wexford—see how good he is!"

"I'm better," stuttered the soldier; "try me!"

"Never mind her, Meddlicott," laughed Higgins. "She only wants to draw the long *beau*!" And the company laughed.

"Though she is not an 'Archer'?" murmured Mr Gash, and a roar followed the thrust.

"Aye—and take a shot at the truth as well as the best of 'em," retorted the "Sham Squire" with unaltered front.

"And shoot folly or treason as she flies," added Newell.

"You are right there!" shouted Beresford. "By G—d, they are the same thing in Ireland!"

"Well, all I can say," remarked Higgins, stirring his punch, "is that when we go shooting treason, God send us a good 'setter.'"

A diabolical grin darted round the table; Sirr glanced covertly at Gash's composed face.

"And send us all sense enough to lock the *stable door* —before the steed is stolen," observed that gentleman quietly.

"Oh, by the Lord Harry, you are up to snuff!" roared Higgins. "Sink me, isn't M—— You know who—a damned ruffian? So cool, so calm, so cursed a prig!"

"Aye, aye," said Sirr, "and the little girl at the Yellow Lion all in pieces about the white-chockered thief. 'Sdeath, there's nothing on the stage to beat it!"

"Come, come, gentlemen, don't talk politic," said Mrs Llewellyn. "No tales out of school, even though it be the school for scandal."

"Seminary," corrected Mr Gash, dexterously preventing her from refilling his glass.

"Don't you mind the 'Seminary,' Mr Gash," retorted that worthy. "May I be hanged in my—cap-strings, I don't know why I should be so set on! My poor little girls can't be left alone a minute, or do a thing without drawing idle tongues upon them. I'm the most persecuted woman in all Dublin, and if I had not good friends, I ask you in the name of Almighty God, what would I do?"

"What is it you don't do?" murmured Mr Gash.

"Shure," continued the lady, unheeding, "it is only a few nights ago two dirty mean sneaks, who didn't pay me a penny for their entertainment, got up a quarrel about their dirty cards and brought the watch atop of us!"

"How devilish inconsiderate!" observed Mr Gash.

"Wasn't it?" assented the lady. "And then the language—Lard! 'twould shock you! And a little girl fresh from the country staying with us! What respect could she have for me after that?"

"Or before it?" muttered Mr Gash, and the company tittered.

"You are very brisk, Mr Gash," continued the dame,

who had heard somewhat indistinctly, "but much good you'd be when I am hauled before the magistrates; God bless 'em! 'Twould have gone hard with me if I didn't get my wine from Alderman——"

"Hold your tongue!" said Higgins. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Ought I?" cried Mrs Llewellyn, who was not oversober. "And what ought you be, Mr Higgins—a Justice of the Peace, too? If I'm dirty, what are those who take my money? There's morality for you!"

This question, which might be said to strike at the root of far more pretentious systems, was parried by Higgins, who paid the lady a compliment.

"Morality," said Mr Gash, pensively tasting his punch, "is like good handwriting. We all ought to write legibly, but if we do not—why, one is not ostracised for it."

"It would be a damned deal better if some of us never learned to write," said Higgins, with an oath and a leer.

"True," replied Mr Gash composedly, "but the passion for playing with edged tools is one of those traits which goes to prove that after all men are but children of a larger growth. Set a savage down on a desert island; ere long he will learn to scratch his illustrious name on a bone, and in two or three hundred years his descendants will be found by the curious inquirer signing another man's name to a cheque—usually for an inconsiderable sum."

Higgins grinned, and laughed somewhat constrainedly; but another voice cried through the tobacco smoke—"Never mind 'em, my buck, we're all dirty those times; we must have women and we must have wine, so here's to the purveyors of both—but it's the devil to pay for 'em."

"Aye, but you cannot have anything without paying for it—either in this world or the next!" laughed Gash, "it's the last lesson we learn."

"Ecod, that's true," said a mellow-looking man. "I can't say much about the women, but really people ought

to pay for their wine. A hogshead goes out of my shop, well and good, its price let's say is eighteen pounds. Well, before I finger the coin it mounts up to five, six or seven times the same in law costs. There isn't a hogshead of claret sent into the country across the bridge of Banagher but has an escort of sheriff and attorneys a year later to recover the price, sink me! That bangs Banagher and Banagher bangs the Devil. But talking of wine reminds me of the watch; what will you justices do, you Higgins and you Drury, to Stephen's Green? It's a perfect disgrace; there are twenty-six dirty little lamps round it and the rogues put 'em out as cool as you please, and then with a looped rope lasso the passers-by like so many red Indian from the American forests, and rob 'em before they know where they are! I was within an inch of being treated in the same way last night, but the rope broke."

"A most appropriate accident, though it might have been reserved for a more critical moment," observed Gash. "But, my good alderman, you should not fall foul of Higgins or Drury. — Justice is lame as well as blind in Dublin!" a sally which provoked some laughter, though Mr Drury looked hardly pleased, and changing the subject, entertained the company with a tedious recital of how he tried to recover a debt.

"Debts are bad things," cried Beresford, who had heard the story before.

"Most are—bad," commented Mr Gash, and Major Sirr began to relate for the twentieth time the arrest of Lord Edward whom he had met once he said at Gibraltar.

"Mr Gash," whispered Mrs Calf, who was sitting beside that gentleman, on pretence of endeavouring to avoid the too pressing attentions of Meddlicott. "I found exactly the girl you were looking for, she is from Wexford too and almost half-witted with terror, just caught, so to speak. I'm training her now, and I believe she will be all right in a week or two."

Mr Gash nodded. "His Lordship will be pleased to learn that," he replied; "Lady Fitzgerald is with the Duke of Richmond now, have you provided for the introduction?"

"Yes," replied the woman, slipping him some sheets of note-paper, "that is Mr Pakenham's writing; the girl will be perfect as a waiting-maid, she's quite savage now—you know what I mean?"

"That will wear off," observed Mr Gash gently, "but she will be quite useless until she is all ears and eyes."

"Oh, she is quick enough, I warrant," replied the woman, "but I find it difficult to harden her, she thinks everybody a saint."

"That too, like the glory of this world, will pass away," smiled Gash. "You should impress her with a sense of your influence and protection, a judicious mixture of fear and gratitude should prove most effective."

"Oh, I am doing my best," answered Mrs Calf, "but, Mr Gash, to whom shall she take her information?"

"You will learn that at the proper time," replied the gentleman, who did not know himself. "I had in my eye, a woman, a widow down at Taghmon, but luckily I discovered at the proper moment that she was a croppy spy."

"It's a pity the girl could not be got ready when her Ladyship was sailing from Dublin," continued the woman. "They gave her the choice of the Parkgate or the Holyhead packet I hear—Lard, ain't the Government prodigiously civil?"

"Civility will be the death of 'em," retorted Mr Gash between his teeth. "Well, do your best; do you want money?"

"N—o," replied the woman reluctantly, "I suppose you did not see any of my grand relatives—the Birds?" she said after a while. "Lard, what a world it is! There's Nellie, she is not much older than me and she'll be a lady, and look at me, toiling and moiling

from morning till night—and all because there are two sides to a blanket, sink me!"

Mr Gash coughed.

"Oh, you may laugh," continued Mrs Calf, forgetting that he had not answered her question, "but it's damned hard to feel that you can't get a share in your sinful father's estate simply because one's trusting mother wasn't married to him!"

And in a fit of retrospective melancholy, she emptied Mr Gash's tumbler.

There was a little stir in the room, a dark-eyed girl had just come in, and was being saluted by the gentlemen in turn. She gently knocked Mr Gash's head against Mrs Calf's cranium with an airy laugh and sank to the very floor in a propitiatory curtsy. Gash rose and bowed gravely.

"And how was the house to-night," he cried.

"Much as usual—a bear garden," laughed the girl, recovering herself, Western witchery in tone and glance. "They were all the time shouting—'A hiss for Castlereagh!' 'A cheer for Lord Edward!' 'To hell with Sirr!' and so forth. Lady Castlereagh was there too, it being a Government night, and a lot of the Castle set—all lace and diamonds; but Lord, she was pale as a sheet under her rouge! You should see the sticks of her fan shaking every time they howled hell to her husband!"

"What did they play," asked Gash.

"The Castle of Andalusia," answered the actress, "the mean dogs cut out seven of my best lines, but I don't care a thraneen about that, I'm going to London, there isn't one of 'em can knock a feather out of Sherry!"

"Right, Lady Teazle!" laughed Gash, "upon my honour you are the best fine lady I ever saw on the stage or off it."

"Don't you think we had better leave honour out of the question?" quoted the dame, with another delightful

well of their country. Then he said
should have one as he was an honest
so much that I took pity on the rogu
home in my sedan chair with a trio of
to see him safe! But come on, life
anything save fun, so tip us a stave, an
good, I'll sing the 'Cruiskeen lawn' m
'Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen!

And with the bouncing dame on his
swung into Sheridan's lines with mu
gesture, and sang them very well indee
chorusing *con amore*, and then settled
the night as, after all, nights have be
spent to the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER XIX

NEXT morning as he was making his way on foot to the Castle he was confronted to his intense surprise by Fanny Gore. She blushed vividly, and lowered her velvet eyes before his own with an embarrassment which was almost painful.

"An unexpected surprise!" cried Mr Gash, "Dublin is richer by one lovely face the more; to what may we attribute it?"

"My mother thought it safer than Arklow or Carnew, after the fight at Enniscorthy which you have doubtless heard of," replied Fanny, falteringly, and playing with a packet she carried in her hand. "I wished to meet you to give you this, you forgot it in the room you occupied a few hours when you were at Arklow, your hostess asked me to take charge of it."

Mr Gash could hardly conceal his delight. "I am your debtor once again," he murmured. He could not fail to read the message in the bold brown eyes, but averting his own, thought of Irene's serene gaze, and wished that it was she who had done this thing. Then he wondered if Fanny knew to whom the book within belonged, and glancing at the envelope in which he had sealed it, saw the string was uncut.

He turned with her down the street, and they walked a short distance conversing on the topics then in the minds of all, until they reached a corner where Miss Gore paused and held out her hand.

"We are not seeing anyone of course," she said, "but if you care to call at our lodgings at Harcourt Street, mother will be glad to see you—you saved our lives."

Mr Gash was sufficiently grateful. "Had you any company?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the girl, "Miss Bird."

"Oh, then she has changed her mind," remarked Gash, vaguely troubled.

"Yes, apparently, when she understood we were going to Dublin, she resolved to accompany us thither; she is I think going to England. At least, that is the reason she gave," the girl continued with a straight look.

Gash rubbed his chin; in spite of himself, he was a shade alarmed, he knew Nellie had acquaintances among the Castle set who could easily damage him if they were so minded, and that she was actually related to some of the principal actors in the squalid tragedy of the Betrayal.

"She was offended, I fear, the other day?" he remarked pleasantly, "but, what could I do?"

Fanny smiled, but the smile died away soon. "I think—I am sure she would do you any injury she could," she said quietly, "she is you know related to the Hobarts, Lady Castlereagh's people, and of course would have opportunities that way."

"Oh indeed?" said Mr Gash, and he began to weigh probabilities. Fanny held out her hand again.

"You have been very kind," he said, almost ashamed of himself. "I only hope that some day I may have the chance of repaying you."

The girl bent her head awkwardly to check the unbidden tears of wounded vanity, and turned away with a few commonplace words, while the man to whom she had rendered this signal service went from her towards the Castle in the wake of the First Secretary's carriage as it swept on through the crowded streets amid a storm of hissing.

"Mr Gash."

Lord Castlereagh rose; a gentleman with side whiskers, sitting at a desk, turned his neck as well as his stock

would allow, and the well-trained servant stepped back as the visitor entered leisurely.

"Ah, Mr Gash," exclaimed his lordship coming forward, "we hardly expected you so soon, the atmosphere of Wexford is not suited to quick travelling."

"On the contrary," smiled Mr Gash, "though much depends upon the route; the pike and the blunderbuss have accelerated as well as simplified modes of departure from that county."

"So it seems," replied his lordship, laughing and pointing to a list of persons injured in the outrages which immediately preceded Oulart. "The troops have been handled badly I believe?"

"In both senses, yes," answered Mr Gash, taking a chair to which the other courteously motioned him, and bowing to Mr Secretary Cooke, the second gentleman, "though of course there cannot be any doubt as to the issue."

His lordship's eye-lids flickered a moment, and then he reseated himself.

"Mr Neville is well, I trust?" said Mr Cooke softly, after a second's pause.

"I trust so," replied Mr Gash, softly too. "Major Heathcote has been staying at his place," he added quickly.

"Ah," observed his lordship, "a very zealous officer, I am told. By the way, Cooke, this Newell must be checked, he has no discretion. I assure you, Mr Gash, he created quite a disturbance in the Castle Yard yesterday."

"That is the praying-faced gentleman?" asked Gash.

"Exactly, ha, ha," replied his lordship. "He has been of some use, and takes the airs of a saviour of the state in consequence, I wish he had some people's modesty."

"A retiring disposition coupled with a talent for saving states are rarely found together, they neutralize one another," replied Gash.

Lord Castlereagh shuffled his papers. "Is Mr Neville

still of the same mind about selling his place at New Ross?" he asked.

"I am glad to say he has changed his intentions," replied the other, proffering the letter which he had addressed, but not sealed. "At my representation he determined to write to you upon the subject, and has done me the honour of making me the bearer."

The marble serenity of the face opposite broke into a slight smile, and while Lord Castlereagh perused the letter, Mr Cooke searching among his papers, showed Mr Gash a recent number of a Dublin print containing a virulent squib on the Sham, over which they laughed decorously.

Presently his lordship looked up. "Very well," he said, "excellent! We will buy at the figure, it is quite a reasonable one too. Does he require money now?"

Mr Gash saw a chance, and weighed it with almost a gasp of pain. The probability that Castlereagh would know of Neville's death for some weeks at least, was remote, sooner or later it would become common property, but the particulars might never reach his ears; he thought of Nellie Bird, of Fanny Gore and her mother, one was leaving the country, the other was in retirement, and instinctively he felt he had nothing to fear from them. Still, it was risk, though in any case Castlereagh would be powerless, and fortune might play into his hands as she had done before, by enabling him to render some fresh service to the state; he thought of Irene, and the thought decided him.

"He would be obliged if you would advance about half on account for immediate necessities," he replied; his lordship bowed.

"You will act as Mr Neville's agent?" he said.

"Undoubtedly," answered Gash, "I am a plenipotentiary."

His lordship laughed, went to a side-drawer and returned to his place accompanied by the pleasantest

sound on earth, the rattle of crisp bank-notes, the jingle of gold. There was a pause of interest while the Secretary counted the guineas and marshalled the notes, then Mr Gash wrote out a receipt which he dated a day or two before through an oversight, and pocketed the money with a certain high-bred suggestion of reliability most impressive to behold.

"Major Heathcote has been in your direction I understand?" his lordship went on; Mr Gash looked at him. The other's eye said, "You may be explicit." And in reply Gash silently handed him the pocket-book.

The Secretary took and opened it quietly, read a few entries, turned to the title-page where the owner's name was inscribed, read a little and fluttering the leaves between finger and thumb, dipped here and there into the memoranda, his face darkening.

"Has he missed this?" he asked suddenly, looking up.

"He has," replied Mr Gash, smothering a smile.

"He knows more than I should have expected from a man of his appearance," observed the other. "See, Cooke—'Inspected Scarawalsh infantry; bad condition, found on inquiry'—on inquiry, mind—'that the arms had been already condemned at the Castle, but being smuggled in again with some refurbishing, were issued and charged as new in the accounts.' Gad, that's something for Corry at any rate. Listen to this—'Found that a most villainous practice exists of selling the redundancy of powder left over after each yearly distribution, such being looked on as a perquisite, a practice which would defeat the very intention of Government in issuing same, viz.:—the improvement of the troops in the art and exercise of musketry, the quarter-master benefited striving to save as much as possible.' Ah—'May 25th. Dined at Malplaquet, met much company there and officers; a gang of yahoos, except my host, who has some motive I am sure in enduring them'—Good heavens! Were you there, Gash?"

"I had the honour," replied Mr Gash.

"So!" continued his lordship, "he falls foul of everyone, here's an item—"Smith, officer in militia, told me a river was the best possible thing to have behind an army, because it covers the rear. Did not know what I meant by marching to flank. Gore, officer in Camolin cavalry, thought charging in column the best method of attack, because those in front would shelter the others, did not know the average width of roads nor height of ditches. Did not know what I meant by dry foraging. Said Lord Castlereagh was buying up the votes of the country, and wished he had one to sell. A d——d fool.' A wise man, egad," commented his lordship, "Though," he added, glancing at another entry, "he does not know what saucisson is. Ha! ha!" he continued—"so he knows the Leinster set! Here's something—'Lord Edward Fitzgerald arrested at Mr Murphy's house in Thomas Street, a most promising officer spoiled, met him at Mr Pitt's. Lady Louisa Connolly distracted with grief, they mean to make a victim of him, one witness only being needful in their treason trials. Saw Lord Castlereagh, a d——d unreliable face. Locum tenens for Pelham who is gone to England. It looks as if Government here contemplated something for which no one is to be responsible. Am glad I am going to Kildare. Rogues all.'"

Lord Castlereagh looked through a few other entries, and then shut the book with a snap. "I misjudged Major Heathcote, though I was prepared for a good deal from his despatches, he is one of these men one must shoot or give a command to; we'll do neither, ha, ha, but we shall send him home. I observe here an entry which has been blackened over—who is Irene Neville?"

Mr Gash's brow contracted. "A daughter of Mr Neville," he replied.

His lordship held the paper against the light. "The reference appears to be complimentary to the lady," he observed, "and in verse too—here is 'glove' and 'dove'

—and I daresay 'love' is not far off, though he seems to have been gravelled at that point, 'tis a good man's case. Well, well, I am to conclude that Major Heathcote makes entries and then effaces them, a most useful practice. If we edited ourselves wisely the world would see fewer memoirs, we would buy mirrors instead."

"And the world would be the gainer," remarked Mr Gash. "The difference between a memoir and a mirror is that the former shows you as you would wish to be seen, the latter as you are—sometimes. In the case of public men, however, the observation does not hold true, there is not much danger of being taken at one's own valuation. Do what one may, people will talk; I do not think that Alcibiades stopped the mouths of the Athenians when he cut off his dog's tail."

Castlereagh smiled wearily. "Abuse is the one thing of which a man can be sure in Ireland," he said. "It is the way of the world."

"Yet Alexander wept because he had no more to conquer," remarked Gash.

"Perhaps, but he did not weep because there were no more to govern," replied the statesman. "He was never in Ireland; we are all Alexanders here."

He paused, there was the grateful frou frou of silk and the silvery tinkle of ladies' laughter in the ante-room; the door was flung open and a servant announced Lieutenant Colonel Walpole.

Like the other two gentlemen Gash rose and stood by, perfectly collected, while the usual greetings passed. Then there was a pause, but Mr Gash stood his ground when a meaner villain would have slunk away. He had made it a rule never to neglect making the acquaintance of anyone who might be useful to his own advancement, he knew that ten minutes' conversation with an influential man, or ten minutes' adroit flattery of a pampered woman would often count more towards worldly success than would the possession of far more solid acquirements, and

perhaps the greatest proof of his tact, as well as of his courage, is to be found in the fact he compelled from his employers a degree of respect rarely accorded by rascals to rascals. The late Lord Clonmel might have pointed to him as an example of the really admirable maxims which he has left us for the conduct of life.

In a moment Lord Castlereagh grasped the situation, and seeing in it an opportunity of advancing his own plans, introduced with a few gracious words Mr Gash and the splendidly attired warrior who began immediately to ask many pertinent questions regarding the topography of Wexford, questions which Mr Gash contrived to answer in such a manner that he seemed to acquire the information he imparted, while Castlereagh gave some directions to Cooke in a low voice.

"Did anything strike you, sir, in regard to the late operations in that part of the country?" asked Walpole.

"Yes," replied Mr Gash immediately, "the want I shall not say of courage, but of promptitude in the character of our proceedings there. We do not seem to have any great general to whom we can look, we want such a man, not necessarily a veteran, but one with what I may call the military instinct, who can mature a plan, carry it out effectually and like Milton's 'two-handed engine' smite once and smite no more."

"Exactly," cried Walpole, toying with his eye-glass, "my own idea to a T. All this talk about experience goes for little; look at that Scotch brute Abercrombie, he had his chance, but he felt he could not manage the thing so he blamed the troops—a bad workman, Mr Gash. One pitched battle properly conducted, and the rebels are broken, for after all, torturing women and burning cabins is not war. That is my opinion, and it seems I am to have an opportunity of putting it to the test."

"And I sincerely hope a successful one," said Castlereagh looking up, "General Loftus who was at Arklow, will prove a most valuable aide."

"Oh yes, as an aide," replied the other, "but I mean to impress on the general that I am in command—Oh, we are sure to win if my plans are carried out, there is not the chance of failure, everything provided for and against, I took three to one from Lord Camden that the rebels would not abide our shock twenty minutes, and Lady Barrington laid me a fan to this snuff-box that they would beat us in half the time. Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you took it?" with finely simulated interest.

"Aye, to be sure," answered the other, beginning to play with a "quiz" which lay on the table, "and my head into the bargain, madam, says I, for I can't offer my hand until we kill Sir Jonah. By the way, Lady Castlereagh is all in my favour, she says we'll hunt 'em out of the field. I trust your lordship will use some discretion in the matter of my appointment, which I understand waits only a few signatures."

It occurred to Mr Gash that discretion was hardly the quality to be appealed to.

"Gad, I suppose Lady Barrington will re-open that window opposite Clonmel's, now he's dead?" said Cooke coming to his chief's assistance.

"Aye, but his wife is not!" laughed the peer, "Gad, that woman has a tongue like a razor!"

"How?" asked Walpole.

"You see the houses are opposite one another, and Lady Barrington whose father was one Grogan, a silk-mercer, had the habit of sunning herself at a window overlooking Clonmel's mansion; this, Lady C—— objected to with no effect until she observed to some damned good-natured friend that as Lady Barrington was no doubt accustomed to look out of a shop window for the display of her silks, she could not give it up. And the point of the joke is that both ladies were in the haberdashery line before marriage."

There was a peremptory knock at the door, Gash went forward and opened it at a glance from Lord Castlereagh.

Outside, covered with dust, a trooper stood, saluting. The Secretary nodded imperiously, he advanced, and handed him a packet which the other tore open, glanced over, crushed together in his hand, and then smoothed out again. The other men looked at each other, the soldier stood stock-still regarding the group with a stolid stare.

"Hah," said Castlereagh, after a pause, "so they have abandoned Wexford and have fallen back to Duncannon, for that's the gist of it. To what regiment do you belong?"

"To the Taghmon cavalry, plaze your honour," replied the man.

"Did they get away safely?" asked the Secretary.

"Yes, sir, in a manner," replied the trooper cautiously, "Captain Snowe who was in command, got hold of Mr Colclough, a pestilent rebel, and he persuaded the people to let us pass a great piece of the road, but later on we fell into an ambuscade, and were attacked by cavalry with a French officer leading, and Murphy of the Shelmalier, who deserted."

"Oh, make a note of that," said Castlereagh. "You helped to cover the retreat?"

"Yes, we did," replied the modest soldier, "but our best officer, Major Heathcote, was not with us, he's gone on I heard to New Ross in command of the dragoons."

"Ah, thank you," replied Castlereagh, darting a look at Gash. And then having asked the man some further questions, he dismissed him with a guinea.

"Colonel Walpole," he said, "you will hold yourself ready to march; Mr Gash, you will please act as the Colonel's aide, and obey his directions—one moment." Mr Gash advanced, and the two men talked in low, earnest whispers near a door at the other end of the apartment; then the Secretary returned to the cabinet, and paid the spy a fresh sum of money which was receipted most methodically.

"Let me see those letters soon," he continued pointing to some scraps of note-paper he had given Gash. "The mail bag will be at your disposal, but I think it better if you deliver it yourself at New Ross, however, I commend that to your discretion. He must be got out of the country at once. You can desert Walpole's detachment as soon as you please, once the road is clear. Impress upon him if possible, the advisability of consulting with other generals."

Mr Gash nodded, gathered up his papers, and departed with his chief who was in high spirits, despite the bad news just received, which it is only fair to say he did not quite comprehend, and both walked into the sunlit streets, the spy glittering in the gorgeous warrior's reflected glory, and though their conversation was of the lightest, looking as deeply impressed as if it dealt with the weightiest State secrets.

CHAPTER XX

LORD CASTLEREAGH was putting Neville's letter in a drawer when the handle of a door at the farther end of the room was timidly turned as it had been once or twice during his interview with Gash, opened slowly, and a lady ushered Nellie Bird into the apartment.

His lordship's eye lightened a moment, the masked face broke into a human smile, and he went forward, eagerly taking the little hand she gave him with something of coquetry.

"I see that your roses have not suffered after the night at the play-house," he said, bowing to Miss Bird, with a smile which gave the effect of sunlight upon ice. "I trust that we did not keep you waiting," he continued, "and that you did not hear any State mysteries."

Nellie Bird smiled too. "That was Mr Gash who was with you but now?" she said.

His lordship looked at Lady Castlereagh, who blushed. "Indeed? You know Mr Gash?" he said.

"Certainly," replied Miss Bird, "he made one of the party at Malplaquet House when poor Mr Neville, the member for Coolmore, and my dear brother were killed."

"Yes," interposed her ladyship, "he was in the yeomanry, you know, and was dining there; it was very sad."

Lord Castlereagh thought at the moment that there were somewhat sadder occurrences in this world; he had considerable control over his features, but he could hardly command them now, as he shook his head dolefully, and took up the quiz; Mr Cooke looked out of the window.

"Accept my sincerest regrets," said his lordship after a slight pause, wondering how long the two women had

been at the door. "It is a source of keen and constant chagrin to know that this wretched business cannot be adjusted but at the cost of valuable lives which might otherwise be spent more usefully, though of course not lost more honourably. I believe, Captain Bird, your father, has an appointment in Wexford?"

"Oh, yes," replied Nellie, whose beautiful face had flushed at the empty words, "but although we set out from Enniscorthy in order to go to Newtownbarry where he is, Mr Gash who was in command of our escort, or rather assumed it, compelled us to accompany him to Arklow where we were obliged to remain, but the accommodation was so abominable, as Lady Castlereagh knows, that I decided to come on to Dublin and—take ship for England."

"Oh, yes, it was prodigiously dreadful, it makes my flesh creep to think on it!" said her ladyship, to whom her relative had represented the discomforts of her sojourn at Arklow with a directness of speech and a wealth of illustration which defy reproduction.

"Ah, I wonder what would have been the result, had Mr Gash been civil?" thought his lordship. Aloud he said, "You had an escort? What do you think of our yeomanry, and their chance against the rebels?"

"The troops," said Nellie Bird calmly, "are without exception, from colonels to drummers, the damnedest set of w—sons who ever buttoned a gaiter."

There was an appreciative pause.

"Even the regulars?" observed his lordship in a rather faint voice.

Miss Bird shrugged her shoulders. "There is not much to choose," she said. "Yet, a dragoon who got us away from Malplaquet, a Major Heathcote, seemed to know his business, and made a tolerably good fight at a ford—'twas pretty to see 'em at half sword in the water among the cows when the croppies caught 'em. They were led well too by a spark in a French coat who fought like a

devil, one Devereux I heard the men call him. Possibly he is not unknown here?"

Lord Castlereagh smiled. "Major Heathcote is a capable officer you think?" he said.

"Yes," answered the girl, "he took, I thought, Miss Neville and her aunt under his special protection, carried her off from 'em all—Gash and the rest I mean—and so on."

Lord Castlereagh smiled again, and asked some further questions regarding the attack upon Malplaquet House which she answered fully.

Lady Castlereagh who had been watching her husband's face, now interposed. "We ventured to intrude upon your time," she said, "because you observed the other night you would wish someone could keep an eye on Lady Edward who will be at her old work again, and as dear Nellie is going to England I thought she might be kind enough to oblige you."

His lordship bowed. He had already gauged Nellie as accurately as a man may a woman, and had made his deductions.

"It is a delicate mission," he said turning to Miss Bird, "and I believe you are very fitted to discharge it—when do you purpose leaving Ireland?"

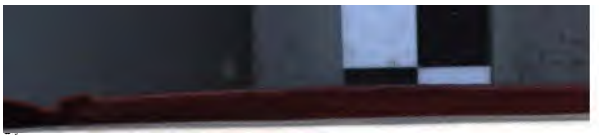
"In a few days," replied Miss Bird.

"Ah, exactly, you will stay with us the while?" he answered affably. "Well, our position is this, Lady Fitzgerald is at present with the Duke of Richmond at Goodwood—is it not, Mr Cooke?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Cooke, who was at his table writing rapidly.

"Very well," continued Castlereagh, "a trusty person will be sent across to take service with her, and will convey to you any matters of serious interest which may come under her observation, the lady being immersed in Jacobinical conspiracies, and an enemy of Government."

"But how am I to live in the meantime?" said Miss Bird. "If father is killed where shall I be, with our little



property swamped as it is? My brother has already died in your quarrel, Lord Castlereagh."

"Not in mine!" said his lordship hastily. "Am I responsible?"

"Somebody shall be; although we need not discuss the question," replied Miss Bird. "There are two opinions on the advisability of letting things go so far, I cannot live on nothing, or my family, which means the same thing. Much is not to be got by trusting to rich relations, no nor to influential ones either. Look at Lady Fitzgerald—the way the Leinsters are treating her! All letters and condolence and wishing her to the devil at the same time! Do you think Richmond will go on supporting her and the three children? Not he! He will play at the game of sending the fool farther, I'll be bound. I'll do anything you want done, if it is not *too* dirty. I'll follow her abroad —I can speak French like a native—or make her acquaintance in England, and talk croppy talk until my very tongue falls out, if you have not got someone to do it already. But not for nothing—"*Dans le siècle où nous sommes*—You know the rest."

"Well," said his lordship quietly, "how much do you expect?"

"One thousand pounds," replied Nellie distinctly.

"One thousand fiddle-sticks!" cried Castlereagh.

Nellie Bird leaned across the table and looked into the man's blank eyes. "My lord," she said, lifting a forefinger, "it is not too much for the work. If others do not know their value, I do know mine. If you had my information about Malplaquet House half an hour ago, would you have paid Gash five thousand guineas for what—a dead man's vote?"

The face opposite shrunk and hardened at the same moment, the eyes shone with the cold rage of an angry snake, but no sound issued from between the set lips.

"Listen!" said Nellie Bird again. "You might as well trust me as not—you must trust someone in the affair,

yet you cheese-pare with me—one of the family! You think a thousand too much? Call it indemnity for poor Sam's death, call it an expression of your regret for the circumstances you say you deplore, call it what you like, only let it be one thousand pounds."

Lord Castlereagh pursed his lips, Lady Castlereagh was laughing somewhat constrainedly with Mr Cooke, but the flutter in her tones showed she was listening.

"Well, well," said his lordship, "since you put the matter in that light, I shall consider your proposal. I shall expect the instant transmission of all information you may acquire concerning the doings of those against whom we have to guard the interests of the kingdom, and case of great urgency, you should communicate with Mr Pitt. I shall provide you with all the necessary introductions. Oh, there is another thing—this Gash—you are no friend of his?"

"He is absolutely indifferent to me," said the lady.

"Exactly; it means the same thing," observed his lordship. "Well, I am not too well pleased with this gentleman, and I should like to have him watched in turn. Do you know of anyone in Wexford?"

"Yes," replied the girl, after a pause; "I know an officer in the yeomanry who would keep an eye on him, a Lieutenant Thorncroft, but he would want a captaincy in a line regiment," she continued demurely.

"You seem to know him very well and his requirements?" said the other, bending a questioning glance on her.

"Well, yes," answered the girl, brazenly or frankly, as the reader chooses to take it; "he knows Gash very well, too. I heard him speak of another also, a sort of spy who used to come to a station, the Hermitage, which was attacked just before they took Malplaquet, but I forget the name."

Lord Castlereagh looked interested. "Tell me all you recollect about the affair," he said, leaning his head

upon his hand. Nothing loath, Nellie described with the utmost minuteness all that had transpired on that fatal May evening, paying some dexterous tributes to Thorncroft's gallantry at Oulart. His lordship listened attentively, and then made a sign to Cooke, who was talking about the health of his sister-in-law, Mrs Swayne. He came forward with a small book.

"Attend if you please," said Castlereagh. "Perhaps some of those names may help your memory." And the other read slowly aloud a list of many, some by this time known to a public proverbially wise after the event. When he came to "Harrigan," Miss Bird held up her hand.

"That is it!" she cried. "One of the officers who escaped from the Hermitage said he got off, I remember."

"Very well," said his lordship. "You recollect him, Cooke—he took the message to Sirr that evening, a black-browed vil—man? Gash was to pay him, as he persistently refused to come forward. He has had, I believe, an adventurous career."

Cooke said something in a low voice; the other nodded. "Like enough," he replied. "If Gash has choused him in any way, it will be so much the better; he was to have received two hundred pounds, was it not?"

"Yes, but if Gash has paid in full, which is hardly likely, we must call it two hundred and fifty at the least," observed Cooke.

Castlereagh laughed bitterly. Then he turned to the girl again. "You must find out where he is," he said; "we wish to communicate with him immediately. Mr Thorncroft should be able to trace him—do you know where he is?"

"Yes, at New Ross," she replied. "I'll write; it will insure its not being opened. You will not forget the captaincy?"

"No," said Lord Castlereagh. "What is the gentleman's Christian name?"

"Christopher—I think," replied Nellie.

His lordship made a note of it.

"But, Lord Castlereagh," said Miss Bird, as the nobleman rose with the evident intention of ending the interview. "I might as well tell you I want money in advance, too. I only reached Dublin last night, and could not make a suitable appearance here, but for my cousin's kindness. I want money for clothes—unless, indeed, you are so economical that you wish your wife to go on lending me smocks!"

Were Lord Castlereagh the fiend he is represented as being, he might have remained steel to this terrible statement hurled at him with accusatory eloquence of tone and glance; being only a man, however, he blenched somewhat, lifted a deprecatory hand, and wrote out a cheque which Nellie carefully examined before accepting.

"Mr Cooke will see to the packet by which you may wish to travel," he said, "but there is time enough for that; we shall meet at dinner—*au revoir*."

Nellie was conducted from the room. When she had gone, Lady Castlereagh crossed to her husband, her hands outstretched; he put them aside pettishly.

"How long were you behind the door?" he asked.

"An unconscionably long time," replied her ladyship. "I thought Mr Gash would never go."

"Did she hear that report I read?" he asked.

"Is it Major Heathcote's diary? I fear she did," replied the lady.

His lordship muttered a curse. "I'll have those double doors locked to-morrow; they are perfect cabinets for eavesdroppers, but I did not apprehend danger from you."

Her eyes filled. "That girl came to me only last night," she said. "She was in tears and alone in Dublin. What could I do? She begged me to get her some employment, and I thought she might prove useful. She hates the French and the croppies beyond measure. I did not go back into the ante-room, because I heard Lady Connolly's voice there, so we had to remain."

"Egad, she seems to have a talent for hating," her husband replied. "Probably Gash has been playing fast and loose with her—they are a dirty lot. I wish I was done with it all. A fellow flung a stone at the carriage this morning. I almost wished it had struck me instead of bounding off the roof." He bowed his head, the face becoming more like a mask than ever; only wrinkles appeared to start forth about the eyes and mouth, until it looked quite aged, as if the weary soul was showing through beneath. She sat beside him and put her head against his shoulder.

"Well, well," he said, rousing himself, and patting her hand. "Let be—carry the day. The longest liver will get all. She will do I daresay. Gad, she can drive a bargain! That Gash is an infernal cheat, he nicked me out of a round sum, however, Harrigan's the lad to match him. Gad, it's nothing but treachery in this huge whispering gallery they call Ireland. Ha, ha! It will be amusing, Gash taking one letter and the mail carrying another to put a spoke in his wheel. Who can this Thorncroft be? Some spark from Cork, I daresay, who has caught her fancy—Possibly he's fit enough for a captaincy."

"It's pitiable about those Leinster people," said Lady Castlereagh after a long pause. "I met Lady Connolly yesterday, it would grieve you to see her poor eyes, how red they were!"

"I flatter myself that yours would be redder by this time, if her precious nephew succeeded."

His wife pressed his arm, and they were silent again.

"Do you think he will die?" she said presently.

"It would be better if he did," replied Castlereagh, "that is if Ryan dies, he is worse to-day, by the way. However, you may depend upon it that any interest the Richmonds can make, they will with Portland, and the Prince, and even the King. You see there is another point in their favour, it is doubtful whether Swan declared his authority and his mission when he broke into the room.

And although that may not weigh here, it will count in England, and he might get off on the ground of justifiable homicide."

"And you will not have any of them see him?" asked the woman tentatively.

"No, no," answered his lordship, "there has been too much of that; I hear she—Madame Egalité—tried to bribe the gaolers. At least so it was hinted, but nothing proved; we cannot risk interviews unless at the last moment."

Lady Castlereagh sighed a little, and rose. "I have taken up much of your time," she said, "but I hope the girl will prove satisfactory. I vow and protest I am half afraid of her."

"Pshaw, a good deal of that manner is acting," replied his lordship.

"Yes, but she let drop when we were coming hither an expression, a something about making those who were responsible for the rebellion pay, if loyal lives were lost —those who knew of and fostered it—her very words," replied his wife.

Castlereagh bent his brows, and then going to a table, searched amid his papers until he found a letter, which, like many others, is not included in his correspondence. It was short, and echoed exactly the same sentiment, with an unveiled threat of murder, and was signed—"Metuenda *dentes* Draconis."

Her ladyship read it over, paling a little. "Could she have written it?" she whispered.

"It is not impossible," replied Castlereagh, examining the altered motto, "it looks decidedly feminine—the Latin. She is a born *intrigante* I could see. Well, we'll use her and amuse her, and drop her when she has done her work and got her pay. Besides, the girl who is to act with her is under the tutelage of Mrs Calf—do you know who *she* is?"

Lady Castlereagh shook her head, his lordship laughed. "She is in our interests at any rate," he said, "and will

prove an effectual check to our little spy. Gash told me just now she has secured the girl who is to act as maid already."

"One thousand pounds is an enormous sum," said Lady Castlereagh.

His lordship put his mouth to her ear. "Ten times the amount would be given by Pitt, as a matter of fact," he said, "Pho, they are a base, stupid gang after all. I know one of them who gave me information the minister would have purchased at a fabulous sum, for five hundred —money down."

"But the fear, the constant fear that all will not go well," whispered the woman hanging on his arm. "They say the rebels are making a fierce fight, if they should win—my God—what shall we have to face!"

"If I knew what fear was, would I be here?" replied her husband, his eye darkening. "No, no, no time for fear, nor pity either. Look beyond it all to the goal! There, go and keep our little intriguer in good temper, for that is half the battle." And he saw her to the anteroom where Nellie Bird was chatting with some ladies who were much impressed by the dignified familiarity with which the Secretary's wife greeted her, and presently they went off with Mrs Pakenham on a shopping expedition to Mr Magan's, and thence for a promenade along Lord Galway's Walk which naturally led to a further excursion into Thomas Street to see Murphy's house where Lord Edward was taken, now occupied by soldiers who were steadily drinking that unhappy vintner's stock in trade, and doing what mischief they could, the street echoing to their boisterous merriment. The same street which was destined to behold the slow tragedy of poor Murphy's after life, to witness the going and coming of that stooped, shabby figure past the house which had once been his, a living shame to the ducal family which left him to starvation, a signal example of the profitless insanity of Irish patriotism.

CHAPTER XXI

DURING the remainder of that day and far into the following one Mr Gash was very busy with his pen, at a more profitable rate of remuneration than he could have hoped had he been composing a new "Rasselas," but he spared a little time for a visit to a coffee-house where the conversation was all of the death and approaching funeral of Captain Ryan. Then he repaired to the Castle with his perfected work, where the letters on which he had been busy were approved of, and leaving them to receive final touches from a master hand, he set out for a hospitably loyal mansion in the suburbs, once owned by Grattan, meeting again a band of kindred spirits in a noble room from whose carved mantel-piece the face of a vine-crowned Bacchus still looks forth with the same serene gaze which has beheld more than one generation of men dancing its chequered way to dust and silence. But, though the door was locked, and the key thrown out through the window, Mr Gash succeeded in slipping off at a reasonably early hour and returning to the city.

It was too late to think of retiring, and he wandered aimlessly about the grey streets while overhead the glorious blue of the morning rose, inexpressibly remote, a symbol of that eternal Perfection which watching from afar, beholds with undimmed brow the sorrows and the shames of Man. His way led him past Newgate opposite the "Stag House" where Sirr's legion of informers and treason-makers were lodged. Even then the windows were alight, and sounds of revelry penetrating to the streets below. Passing on, he halted in the shadow of some adjacent eaves, and with folded arms contemplated

the gloomy prison walls, while near him an oil lamp spluttered in malodorous extinction, and beyond, another struggled bravely still, as if to greet the rising sun. From where he stood, absorbed in thought, he could hear hammering, and recollected having heard someone say that a man named Clinch should be hanged there that day.

Presently footsteps drew near, two persons approached stealthily, one was a woman, and as she pushed her thick veil aside to gaze upward, he recognised her as a Miss Moore; the lower part of her companion's face was hidden, but the long, draped figure, and the prim set of the shoulders, made him lift his brows. The girl, leaning heavily on the man's arm, obliged him to stop just opposite Gash's place of concealment; the other muttered impatiently.

"Hush," she whispered impressively, "did you not hear something?"

"Only that hammering," replied her conductor. "He is a little better, Leake told me so yesterday."

"Oh, how that noise must sound in there!" sobbed the lady. "Oh, the noblest of them all, and what a fate!"

Her companion almost wrenched his arm from her grasp, but checking himself, evidently by a great effort, stood his ground, sometimes lifting one foot and then the other, as if the very earth was growing hot beneath the soles of them.

Another form slowly approached, the tall man lifted his hat. "Well?" he said huskily.

"We must continue hoping for the best," replied the new-comer, bowing to the girl. "He was a little improved when I saw him last, but the feverish condition is not abating; everything is against him, Lord Aldborough's room is no place to keep a patient so badly hurt. This hanging of Clinch here too is a piece of pure savagery, and will probably make him worse."

"Listen!" cried the woman in a tense whisper. "Do you hear his voice? Oh my God, they are killing him!"

There was a pause, the listeners holding their breaths,

through the dull hammering came faint, shrill tones, "Come on, damn you! Come on!"

Miss Moore broke into a silent passion of weeping, the two men endeavoured to quiet her, speaking in low tones, and after a while she became calmer; the defiant voice was not heard now, though the hammering went on, and from the "Stag House" came hoarsely on the morning breeze the chorus of a drinking song.

The gentleman whom they had stopped patted the girl's shoulder. "Possibly I shall be wanted within," he said, "you may be sure that his lordship is not altogether friendless; a little time will tell, and then, perhaps, things will mend."

He passed on, and the lady moved away also, reluctantly. "Oh Francis, Francis," she murmured, adjusting her veil again, "if there be one thing for which I shall thank God to the end of my days, it is that Tuite gave my father timely warning, and that he was not taken under our roof. Oh, Ireland, Ireland, how is it that you bring misfortune to all who love you?"

The man made some indistinct reply, and taking his companion's arm, drew her away gradually until their forms melted into the shadows beyond. Mr Gash stealing out from his place of observation, looked after them with a smile which a fiend might have envied.

"Magan, by G—d!" he muttered, "if she marries him, she'll drive him mad. They talk of romance—what's the best of their fables to this hell of life! How he stands it! Irene, Irene, if you knew. Pah, everyone for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost."

The sun was now up, and the streets astir as he took his way to his lodgings whence he issued after a slight sleep in time to take part in Ryan's funeral train as it moved through the hushed city to St Mary's, and ere the smoke of the last volley had drifted away, hastened to the Castle where he received several despatches for New Ross, amongst them one of the letters on which he had

been engaged, now imposing with scarlet seals, and then set out for Carnew, halting for the night at Rathdrum once more. Here he learned that General Loftus had gone on with all his available forces to Gorey, where there was a "power" of soldiers who expected to be led against the rebels immediately. He reached bloody Carnew in the afternoon only to learn from an officer in charge of two companies of the Dumbarton Fencibles that Walpole had gone across to Gorey, whither he followed, arriving in time for dinner. He found the gallant warrior explaining to Generals Loftus and Scott two extraordinary missives he had written them.

The officers were polite, but evidently distrustful, one of them asking some exceedingly awkward questions, and as the meal or rather council, dragged on, Mr Gash found his diplomatic talents severely tested to prevent any unpleasantness between the commanders, who though not over-intelligent, were beginning to feel uncomfortable as the character of Walpole unfolded itself.

At length the tedious dispute came to a close, and a plan was resolved upon to be put into execution against the rebels who, having already seized upon the heights of Ballymore, and Ballymaan, to the south of Gorey, were now threatening the little village itself, and through it Arklow and the rocky road to Dublin.

The council over, Mr Gash and some of the officers sat to cards, the situation being discussed again, but in a far more serious tone than it had ever been at Neville's table.

"There is no doubt of it," said Ormsby of the Wexfords, leading a knave, "we shall have our work cut out for us to-morrow, the rebels are getting quicker every time they fight. Look at that Kearns, the priest; he nearly took Newtownbarry the day before yesterday."

"Aye, and he would have had it but for the damned soldier-shopkeepers who got frantic when they saw their tuppence-h'penny holdings afire," laughed a dragoon. "'Slife, we were kept on the *qui vive* there I can tell you!

At first we thought they meant to come down on us like a hundred of bricks when a girl named Gibbs—Lucrece Gibbs, if you've heard of her—came galloping into the place, screaming—'Here they are!' and we all turned out, but they didn't come till next day—soon enough."

"L'Estrange made a damned bad fight of it there, I understand," said an officer in blue and scarlet, one Colonel Wynne.

"He could have done better," replied the dragoon. "Think of it, the croppies came along by both sides of the river and nearly caught him, egad, when he was out reconnoitring. There is a hill — Kil—Kilmichael they call it—it's always 'kill' something in Ireland—right to the south of his position, and devil a bit of use he made of it until dislodged by cannister, when he did what he should have done before, and took to the heights. However, all's well that ends well."

"Yes," remarked Stark of the Antrims, "and then do you remember how White, the yeoman cavalry commander the same day down here got his men between two fires, and how Fitzgerald and Roche caught at it and galloped off for reinforcements to Ballymore. That Roche is a born soldier! Luckily the yahoos drew off before they could get back: as it is the Antrims would have a different story to tell if the fools had not fired so high."

"Egad," said Duncan of the Artillery who was looking on the play, "it seems as if we were not to trust to our superior knowledge in this affair but to their superior ignorance."

"The devil a lie in it," answered Captain MacManus, "and this is common on both sides—we are all generals in this war."

The officers laughed a little, and glanced at Gash who had just succeeded in reneaguing, and consequently looked unconscious.

"Can you tell us who is commander?" said Stark, "Scott—Loftus—or this General Walpole from Dublin? Gad, they ought to toss up for it."

"Who is Walpole?" asked MacManus.

"I understand he has had considerable experience," replied Gash at a venture, taking a trick.

"Oh, no doubt—at reviews in the Park," observed Wynne who was losing. "By the way, you are acting as his aide-de-camp I see?"

"Yes," replied Gash, nonchalantly shuffling the cards, "at Lord Castlereagh's request."

This produced an impression, and Mr Gash became absorbed in the game once more.

"Well, he has a damned odd way of doing business," remarked Ormsby, when they had played on a little longer. "He writes yesterday to General Loftus—'Carnew is a splendid place for attacking the rebels at Ballymore, my detachment will beat the whole rebel army, I will wait for you at Wicklow.' My detachment! as if he had raised 'em off his estate, and hadn't only got 'em by going begging round the country for corporal's guards, sink me! 'I'll wait at Wicklow.'—What the devil does he mean by that?"

"I daresay he could explain, if he wrote it," said Gash, his chin on his hand, watching Wynne deal.

"If he wrote it? Sir!" exclaimed Ormsby.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, aisy!" laughed Wynne, "we can't squabble like Boney's generals, let me remind you. I gave you six cards, Gash, shuffle them all again, Ormsby, it's your deal."

"Can't you let Walpole's letter-writing alone?" said a yeoman officer, "it's a way they have. Didn't that son of a gun, Heathcote, wear out two quills writing about one of our chargers which had cast a shoe or so, and some half-dozen ruffians who had lost their sword-knots?"

"Yes, but Heathcote is a good officer," said Ormsby, raining the cards together and spilling some on the table. "But this man is always writing letters, sink me! He writes a second saying he had reconnoitred the rebels and knew all that was going inside their brains, and then while

Scott and Loftus are putting their heads together over this production, here he is, horse, foot and artillery, this evening looking for accommodation! I tell you what it is *mes braves*, teaching this gentleman tactics may prove a very serious matter for us all."

"It will be much more serious if you cannot contrive to deal the cards without letting everyone at the table see the other's hand," said Gash.

"Well, that's not likely to occur to your hand, my friend," retorted Ormsby dryly.

"Does anyone know where Eustace is?" said Stark.

"Where's M'Cann; is Ivors from Carlow come?" quoted Gash.

"Major General Walpole thought he was here," said Duncan.

"Major General Walpole thinks a good many things, and a good many things are thought of him," laughed Ormsby, "but time is to prove whether he deserves them —Loftus for one, hasn't great confidence in him, and he said as much to Scott——"

There was a knock at the door, and an officer entered. "Major General Walpole's orders," he said, addressing Gash. "You will proceed at five o'clock to-morrow morning to Carnew and bring the two companies left there to Clough where they must join the main body."

"An early boot and saddle for me!" said Gash, rising from the table.

"Any further directions?" asked Duncan.

"Yes," replied the officer, referring to a paper, "Lord Ancram will march with the King's County Militia from Newtownbarry and take post at Scarawalsh Bridge, to watch the croppies at Vinegar Hill while we are to attack 'em up here. If all goes well, he is to join us at Ferns."

"Aye, if all goes well," repeated Gash yawning, "a most provident interpolation." And he sauntered away to seek a few hours' sleep.

Next day the march upon the rebel position began at

noon with all the pomp and circumstance of war, the main body composed of the Dumbartons; two small cannon, a howitzer under Duncan, several of the Fifth Dragoons as advance guard, and the Ancient British under Wynne set out for Gorey, Walpole himself in full uniform, mounted on a grey charger, at their head, while Scott and Loftus with a smaller force flanked his advance by another road which branched from the Gorey one, deflecting somewhat until it was met by another running across to Clough, which like Carnew, stands at the apex of a triangle of highways. Here the contingent summoned by Gash joined the main body, marching on its right flank, one hundred of the Antrims under M'Manus being posted on the cross-road to help, or communicate with either Walpole or Loftus.

The troops were now in avowedly hostile territory, but nevertheless continued moving forward at a quick pace. As they advanced the country lay before them under its sentinel hills like a scarred but still beautiful face, the glorious sunlight at once revealing and gilding its desolation. The thatchless cottages standing amid their trampled acres of oats or barley won from the rocky soil, had ceased smoking by this, and with gaping windows, blotched heavily beneath the sills, stood like a silent line of blinded captives gracing the triumph and glutting the hate of some barbarous conqueror. Once a growling cur with a mangled human hand in its yellow teeth, crossed the way from a field crinkled here and there with little oblong mounds which barely hid what the kind hearts who had dug those shallow graves had desired to cover for the love of God. From one of them a something with the sheen of silk upon it lifted and fell as the light breeze blew, something which Walpole took for a woman's gown, but was a woman's hair, mute witness against man born of woman, and his deeds.

The men, who appeared to be in better spirits because of the wreck and ruin around, marched gaily, if the

expression be allowable, singing the songs of the camp and the canteen as they tramped along the white road, a many-jointed line of red, the fixed bayonets glittering through the dust clouds hovering above.

Mr Gash who affected a confidence he did not feel, rode with Walpole's staff, that gentleman conversing affably on the efficacy of round brick towers against cannon fire, and lamenting that the situation of the existing stone ones in Ireland did not lend itself to modern requirements.

As they were approaching the cross-road an officer of dragoons cantered back and reported that he had seen a force of rebels in front.

"Should you think well of it, sir," he said, "I shall order some skirmishers forward, the country is getting closer, and those fences are woundedly high."

"Have we not an advance guard?" answered Walpole, pointing to the handful of troopers glittering away beyond the head of the infantry column already marching somewhat confusedly, the curses of the artillery detail whose horses had become restive being audible above the shuffling of feet and the din of many voices.

"Quite true, sir," replied the officer, after a pause which he might have utilized for secret prayer, "but General Loftus is two miles away, and by extending the flanks you could guard against surprise, especially from the Camolin road——"

"Ah, but we are not going by the Camolin road," replied Walpole, the confused trampling of the disorderly files huddled together in the narrow highway punctuating his words. "We are going straight on to Carrigrua, which you may see yonder—And hark ye, pray remember that I am in command, and that I have some brains."

The officer saluted and withdrew, Walpole began to laugh. "There, that's a flea in my gentleman's ear!" he said, tapping his snuff-box. "What is there to fear?" he added, rising in his stirrups, and glancing over the fields on either side of the road whose banks were

beginning to grow steeper, the aspect of the country changing also with almost startling rapidity. "Nothing but potatoes, sink me! What a pretty flower it is, they say we shall have a fine crop—good news for the croppies, ha, ha, 'twill fill their craws."

The column went on, sharp, excited orders being given in the rear from time to time, and an officer clanked past the staff through the fields, taking the fences cautiously; he had proceeded some distance when Walpole who had been looking after him with a dissatisfied expression, ordered a trooper to recall the gentleman, but before the latter came up with him, he wheeled and rode directly to the commander.

"There appears to be a movement on foot in advance," he said gravely. "I just now saw a fellow on horseback making signals; the artillery is considerably impeded by the foot as it is, and we would find it rather difficult to take position should an attack be made. It might be well to beat the country a little, or may I suggest a halt?"

"You may, sir, but I have not the slightest intention of calling one," replied Walpole. "This is my action, not the action of General Loftus."

"Egad, it's likely to be so," muttered the officer, with a glance at the footmen, now silent and stumbling about the saddle-skirts of the staff.

"So you think the rebels will find us napping?" continued Walpole; "well, we shall see. Look, how the road curves yonder, an admirable place for an ambuscade. Beat the country! By G—d, there has been too much beating of the country and too little beating of the rebels. Ha, ha! it's a damned wilderness."

"I hope it will not be a howling one," retorted the officer, as he clattered back to the artillery.

"Sink me!" observed one of the staff, "I was on a visit a few weeks ago at Mountforrest yonder, and I assure you I should hardly know the road again, ecod, how change makes a place unfamiliar!"

"Yes," assented Mr Gash gravely; "the way in which we resent change is enough to make one think that after all we have a talent for immortality, in spite of the freethinkers."

"What place is that?" asked Walpole.

"Tubbernecarig, yer haner," replied one of the soldiers; "there's some sort of springs there that have iron in 'em."

"Oh, I see, chalybeate," observed the commander; "by the way, Mr Gash, I must get some in a bottle and send it to Lady——"

Crash! From beneath the nodding blossoms in the fields beside the road a veritable sheet of flame burst forth, a spirtle of intermittent fire crackling along the coping of the fences on either side.

The scarlet line paused, attempted to deploy, and a man could be heard saying, "God bless Colonel Tarrant!" as the artillerists began to hack away a hedge with one of the slashing hooks provided for removing such obstacles. Suddenly there was a shout from the front, in answer to a confused volley from the royal troops, and through the smoke could be seen a string of stooping figures running to take up position along a neighbouring fence. The vanguard reeled backward, several saddles empty.

"Take 'em in flank, dragoons!" roared Walpole, whose sword had left the scabbard at the first volley. "Close up there, forward and clear the road."

Round the corner swung a column of pikemen at the charge, and from under the broad leaves of wayside sycamores screamed another shower of lead, a bullet tearing the plume from Walpole's hat, and another cutting a furrow on Gash's cheek, as the staff headed by their chief incautiously rushed upon the levelled pikes only to be forced back a few minutes later on the disordered ranks, too dazed to act promptly, their narrow front decreasing their effectiveness.

Slowly a retrograde movement began along the straggling line, swept by pitiless volleys from the ditches, and a rocky eminence which had caught Walpole's attention a moment

before, though the Fourth Dragoons made a frantic effort to turn the enemy's flank, and the artillery had opened fire, the men serving the gun as coolly as if on parade.

Back along the white length of the narrow road staggered and stamped the shivering column, fighting the way at every yard, the retreat covered by a few companies under a Captain Cope, Walpole, too, playing his part gallantly, his hat now blown away, blood on his dauntless face, blood dripping from hilt and sword-knot.

"Shall I go for M'Manus and his grenadiers; they are on yonder cross-road?" shouted Gash above the din of the cannon, as the pikemen surged nearer.

"Do!" roared Walpole, parrying a pike-thrust, and cutting down the pikeman. "We'll make a stand at the cross, so that the cavalry can act."

Dashing past a group of breathless musketeers, Gash rode furiously through a gap in the wake of a terrified gun-horse flying with trailing traces, and struck out across the fields, seeing the helmets of the Ancient Britons twinkling through the dust as they cantered off beyond the cross in order to charge in column when the foot should have reformed along the flanking fences.

"A surprise?" shouted M'Manus, pointing towards the direction of the raucous din whence the smell of gunpowder came fitfully on the summer breeze.

Gash nodded, pulling up his steed. "It was mutual, I think," he said; "you are wanted; where is the General?"

"God knows; he must be a good distance in advance. I thought we were to keep touch. Well, no matter. Ho there, quick march!"

Some minutes later they were within sight of the low, dark cloud rolling down the Tubberneering road, as the terrible fight strained between the high banks.

"Bah," said the captain, "they are getting it hot. The croppies have 'em at their mercy; if they don't cut 'em off at the cross, they may recover ground. Hah, they are

losing their heads—they'll lose the guns, that will be the end of it. Hurry on!"

Faster and faster ran the grenadiers, the jingle of their accoutrements sounding oddly through the deepening roar of strife, and ere long they reached the cross, where even now a desperate struggle was raging, the Dumbartons rallying round the man on the white horse.

Towards Tubberneering the road was blotted out by smoke-clouds, the artillerists sticking to their work with grim determination, though unsupported, and galled by the fire of a captured cannon. But through dust and smoke flamed a line of scarlet and blue, as Wynne's horse gallantly threw themselves upon the foe.

Shoulder to shoulder, staggering, slipping and straining, the men at the cross fought on, the bayonet against the terrible pike, discipline and dogged courage against headlong valour and the unconscious magnanimity of the peasant soldier resolved to conquer or to die.

Presently the Ancient Britons came galloping back pursued by a tornado of derisive cheers, some of the men holding by their pommels.

"Why did you not bring the gun?" cried Cope.

"The horses ran off with the limber," answered Wynne. "Duncan's hit, so's Armstrong and Stark."

"Where's the general?" continued Cope. "I thought he was with the cavalry."

"I don't know," replied the other, "it would be more to the point if Loftus knew where we were. Did anybody go?"

"No—only Gash for the Antrims, it is too late to send a message now; look at them crowding the road. We can't hold this place any longer, see they have the guns!"

His words were cut short by a shrieking shower of cannister which struck a dozen men apart, and the insurgent column now reformed rushed to the attack.

All along the roads at the cross, and in the fields bordering them a desperate hand-to-hand struggle was fiercely renewed, the pikemen giving no respite, for

although shaken off again and yet again, they returned to the charge with tireless tenacity cheered on by their leaders amongst whom was Edward Fitzgerald, one of the noblest types of Irish manhood the exigencies of that awful time called forth, and Father John, foremost in the charge, last in retreat, a symbol of the intelligence which plans and the courage which executes.

Despite their frantic efforts the King's troops began again to go backward, past the cross, past Clough, on into the Gorey road, a disorganized mass of masterless men, making every now and then determined efforts to form, the width of the highway and the amplitude of the fields here helping them. But the captured cannon raked their position at every fresh halt and the men of the pike, as if guided by instinct, kept them to the close fight. For a moment they would reel back before the volleys, their front shattered, but at need others would take their places, and spring into the gap as they dashed forward once more under cover of the guns with a persistent energy as if they had but that moment sprung armed from the green bosom of their lovely land. And all through the combat practised riflemen on flank and front crept from fence to fence, loading and firing as fast as hand could ram the charge or eye glance along the glowing barrel.

At length the inevitable happened. The cavalry—dragoons, Ancient British and yeomen—a confused mob, were caught by a storm of grape as they galloped furiously at the harrying lines of pikemen, and many of the horses, stung to madness by the wounds, dashed across the fields, or riderless, wheeled round, and burst through the ragged lines of breathless infantry blinded by the smoke, and stunned by the roar of battle which had not once ceased since the first shot was fired some three-quarters of an hour before.

Ere they could extricate themselves, the insurgents rushed to an indiscriminate attack with a fury which showed they saw the crucial moment had come. For

three long minutes the mad struggle lasted. Penned upon the road, or singly in the fields, horse and foot found themselves ringed with stabbing steel, wielded by the arms of men who were individually their superiors. To and fro in blind agony that storm of hopeless combat raged, the pikemen now darting under the horses' bellies, now springing to the saddle with shortened pike, now poised upon the fence tops, darting it to the full length at the hacking troopers, who completely broken, fled, leaving the devoted foot to fight their death fight alone.

Over the country they had ravaged for many a shameful night and groaning day went that riven army, bloody on brow and cheek, but bloodier far on heel, with bloodshot eyes straining for the turn to Gorey, whence already musket shots came quickly as the foremost in retreat ran the gauntlet of patriot musketeers occupying the houses. And in their wake bounded the wreck of the broken footmen as fast as their gaitered legs would allow.

Still a little longer the Antrims battled, though actually running now, until, stopped by a fierce rush, they were cut down or taken prisoners, a plight in which Mr Gash found himself with a broken sword, in the grip of a terrible Shielmalier.

At first he was relieved at the escape from instant death, because the talent for immortality requires considerable cultivation, and then he glanced round, wondering whether he would be recognised, but all the faces in his immediate vicinity were strange, and he heartily blessed the vanity, or rather prudence which led him to bring a semi-military coat from Dublin, several horsemen who served the Government, or wished to preserve their lives, wearing such unofficial uniforms.

Along the fields the majority of the insurgents were pursuing the retreating foe towards smoke-crowned Gorey, but the man on the brown horse whom he had watched on the Camolin road some days before was near giving instructions to a group of men. Then he started,

and hardly repressed an oath, one of them was Harrigan, Harrigan with a green cockade in his hat and a sword by his side.

At that moment the other who was receiving orders from Father Murphy turned, and their eyes met. A faint twinkle of amusement crossed the bronzed features of the spy, and left them expressionless again, as a ray of sunshine may glint upon a moor.

The priest a moment later rode away in the direction of Gorey and Harrigan addressed the pikemen remaining.

"We are going back to Vinegar Hill, boys," he said, hitching his sword-belt, "with the prisoners. Don't treat 'em harshly, but according to the usage of civilized warfare, for they were only doing their duty." An injunction which was quite unnecessary for the captors who were bubbling over with good-nature, though many of their heads were bandaged.

Everywhere the country was covered with flying men, their coats turned inside out, scattering in irremediable confusion though firing was still to be heard, the rout being as hopeless as it was complete.

"Come, gentlemen," continued Harrigan, addressing the prisoners. "We might as well be going our road, it's over ten miles, and the day is not so young as it was."

Gash and the few footmen, evidently surprised at the treatment accorded them, stepped into the irregular ranks, and the party marched back towards the highway whose dust was churned into bloody mire at every yard.

Past Clough they made a detour to avoid something heaped together in the middle of it, something grey and scarlet, and crimson and gold, around which many red and black-coated men were grouped, some lying very still, others feebly crawling hither and thither like little children learning to walk. Coming nearer, they understood. There lay the gallant white charger, there the gallant rider, the smile of a brave man upon the powder-burnt face.

CHAPTER XXII

A NAG still harnessed to the cart, which had amongst other baggage contained the mail-bag, was now caught, Gash being accommodated with a seat upon it, while Harrigan, taking his place on the opposite shaft, cut the seal-defended neck, and coolly began to peruse the letters, several of which he read aloud, adding now and then diabolically humorous character sketches of the writers for the benefit of his laughing command. One, however, he did not read out; it was addressed to Thorncroft in a woman's hand, and it was only by the merest chance he glanced through its brief contents, until he came to his own name and the statement that he was wanted by the Castle authorities.

The journey was long and took them past the scene of combat, on by the skirts of Carrigrew, and from the high ground they could see a thin driblet of steel twinkling in the distance, as the supports under Loftus pursued their circuitous march round towards Tubberneering.

During the entire time Harrigan hardly spoke once to Gash, but led the desultory conversation, so that the state of the country should be made plain and the futility of any attempt at flight.

They were now approaching Enniscorthy, the fields crowded with grazing cattle destined to feed the rebel troops, whose flag fluttered gaily from the top of Vinegar Hill, and marching on by Templeshannon, they soon reached its base, where some earthworks were being attempted. The hill itself presented a novel and animated sight, being almost completely covered by tents or wattled enclosures [illegible] oloured fabric of

every hue and substance, so that it glowed from slope to summit as if planted with variegated parterres, an illusion not carried out by the odour arising from the disemboweled carcases of sheep or oxen stretched where they had been killed to satisfy the need of the moment. On every side evidence of the fierce war of retaliation which had made the Slaney water nightly reflect the glare of burning houses caught the eye; piled up at intervals the new-comers saw trailing brocades and ruby-tinted glass, dazzling silver plate, all heaped together on lacquered tables, the spoil of many a stormed mansion.

Here a marble nymph towered white and serene above a group of peasant women chattering around her pedestal, there a replica of the deathless slave, who edges his knife for the long-deferred blow, lifted a bitter face to a noble copy of one of Raphael's mother-Virgins, whose adorable eyes sought the kindred blue of the summer sky.

There was the sound of music, too, gilded spinnets throbbing beneath unskilful fingers, while at intervals the more difficult violin was weaving gayest caprice of melody, to which, hot as was the day, couples were dancing with the light-hearted gaiety of working folk out for a holiday.

Some refreshments were brought for Gash, and Harrigan, addressing one of the guards, said good-naturedly—"Come, Phelim Fardy, you've marched and counter-marched enough for one day; go and have a pint. Give me your pike, and I'll take care this bird won't fly away."

The peasant, glad to be relieved, relinquished his weapon, and Harrigan, clearing a space at a once hospitable board supporting a mirror graceful with gilded volutes, took a chair.

"Have you any despatches?" he asked in a low tone, tossing aside the rifled post-bag. Gash nodded. "That's cursed unlucky," he continued. "I can trust my fellows, of course; there are three or four of 'em here, but the rest are Murphy's clique, and there is no knowing what

may happen. Oh, egad, we are all leaders; there's great things coming for Ireland, so here's to Mother Erin dressed by a French milliner!"

Gash laughed and glanced at the gibbering women. "I hardly think that she will employ her services," he said; "she will prefer her patch-work quilt to cover her dirt and nakedness a little longer."

"God grant she may," said Harrigan, pouring some water into a silver tankard; "'twould be a good thing for us. It makes a splendid chess-board for a man of business, though a wrong move is death."

"What? Do you think they are likely to succeed?"

"Succeed!" cried Harrigan. "Why, the rascals who marched under me hardly knew how to load a piece. I pledge you my word I have seen many of 'em when they cocked the happer labour to uncock it by beating the thing with a stone, and failing that, shoulder it butt uppermost and so march along quite contented. Others will ram home a cartridge or two, egad, without biting off an end, and others again will most conscientiously bite off the bullet. I tell you I have gone at their head into action to-day expecting to have my brains blown out every other minute, and be civil to the dogs, too."

"But you saw what they did with the pike," said Gash thoughtfully. "Our men were brave of their persons. I tell you that Oulart, Wexford, and this last business are enough to make a man think."

"Think what?" said Harrigan. "I know them! They are mere yahoos. Why are they here? Because they and their women were burned out of their houses. Why do they fight? Because they have no alternative but to die like curs in a ditch. Man! the population of Wexford is just now purely migratory. Ha, ha, ha! Do you recollect the story of old Tarquin and the poppies? Well, that's what the Government has done. They have no plan, no general, no nothing! You see this place now; where are the men? Gone, each about his own

business—some of 'em home. To-night they will be back again, and so the game goes on. It's the same at Carrickbyrne, I doubt not. But, this did puzzle me, at Wexford they were as quiet as if in a church—I thought the gutters would have run blood."

"They certainly are magnanimous," said Gash slowly. "If I were one of them——" He clenched his hand.

"Aye, to be sure!" laughed Harrigan; "you would make a bad enemy. But they are not quite angels yet; look yonder, in the shadow of that tent; there is a man there under slow punishment—possibly he deserves it, but that reflection can hardly make it pleasant, eh? Well, Gash, you would be in his place if they knew, and so would I, ecod; you are naturally well-disposed towards them, because they spared your life, and call them magnanimous when they're simply foolish. Whither are you bound?"

"New Ross."

"That's a far cry," replied Harrigan, "but we'll do our best, there's a contingent of Kearne's yahoos marching for the place to-night, and we may manage to get you sent with 'em, meanwhile, be polite to the ladies—oh, upon my soul they understand good-breeding. With them on your side, you can snap your fingers at those." And he pointed to some men sleeping in the sunshine, their shoes clasped tightly in their arms. "That military coat was a good thought," he went on, "I did not know you at first, you looked quite the soldier."

"A compliment which I beg to return," replied Gash, gravely, "but are you not taking a risk in wearin' o' the green?"

Harrigan laughed. "Aye," he said, "but it is safer than wearin' o' the red for me. Heathcote has found out something, we had a few words at Wexford," and he related the scene at the bull-ring. "You see my military experiences have made me rather traceable; it was a great mistake to have enlisted in the Ninth."

"It was a greater to have joined a certain colonel's regiment," remarked Gash, suavely.

"It was," he replied slowly, "but pshaw, I've got good friends—I've a trick of making 'em wherever I go. That is how I fell into line with the croppies at Wexford, the cowards left a few barrels of gunpowder behind, and I showed where they were, and might have shot anyone against whom I had a grudge without question, so popular did I become. Then, I took the oath—stay I have it here," he continued, fumbling for a piece of paper which he read with many chuckles. "'In the awful presence of God who knows the hearts and thoughts of all men, and calling my country to witness, I Stephen Harrigan, do solemnly swear that I do not consider my life my own when my country demands it; that I consider the present moment calls for a proof of the sincerity of that sentiment, and I am ready and' ha! ha! 'desirous to stand the test; and do aver that I am determined to die or lead to victory,' ha! ha! 'and that all my actions shall be directed to the prosperity of the common cause, uninfluenced by any inferior motive,' ha! ha! 'and I further declare my utter aversion to all alarmists, union-breakers and cowards, and my respect and obedience to the command of superior officers' when I know who they are. Ha! ha!"

"You go under your own name, is that wise?" said Gash.

"Aye, I did not do so without consideration; why, man, the very priest in command here was a schoolfellow of mine; though he does not know me from Adam, but if anything happened which directed his attention to me, a false one would be ruin. However, most of our friends are at Carrickbyrne under one Harvey. Nevertheless, I tell you I must keep my head clear, that's why I am drinking water, and better I wouldn't wish for, well, a short life and a merry one!

"Here's your health in water, wishing it were wine,
Here's a health to your true love, not forgetting mine."

"Ah, indeed, thanks. And what lady do you honour with your affection," asked Gash, languidly examining a Kauffmann.

"My Lady Poverty," retorted Harrigan bitterly. "The damdest bit of constancy ever a man buckled himself to. By the way, who is this *bona roba?* One of the Gunning or Montgomery girls?"

He alluded to an engraving by Sherwin, representing a beautiful woman wreathing flowers about a pedestal.

"Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Cumberland and Strathern," replied Gash, coldly.

Harrigan laughed. "Glory be to God!" he said, coarsely. "We won't know ourselves soon with all the grand company we are in."

"The lady is," continued Mr Gash, evenly, "sister of one Colonel Luttrell, of whom perhaps you have heard?"

Harrigan's eyes appeared to recede in his head, and the cruel mouth locked pitilessly. Then he drew his thumb and forefinger down the corners. "Oh, is she?" he said, slowly. "Her husband's the King's brother—they are a nice lot. But talking about women, do you know one Nellie Bird?"

"I do," replied Gash, carelessly, "a pretty spit-fire from near Carnew, her brother was killed at Malplaquet House, and she's making capital of it. Have you fixed your volatile affections there, if so my Lady Poverty must be left to the next honest man coming the road. No woman endures a rival, but my Lady Poverty is adding insult to injury."

"Well, a man might do worse," said Harrigan, meditatively.

"Worse!" cried Gash, startled into earnestness, "she is a lady."

Harrigan's smile was evil. "Is she?" he said, "well, I suppose she is as much as the rest of 'em."

"Why do you ask?" continued Gash, somewhat interested.

"*Pour passer le temps*," replied Harrigan. "She is pretty you say—what sort of woman is she?"

Gash looked round; near them on a little table stood a Dresden shepherdess, regarding the new world in which she found herself with a pink smile, although her partner lay beneath crushed to fragments by a brogue heel.

"She's exactly like that," he said, "a damned coquette —as pretty and as dangerous as a panther."

"Well, I would not have her change one of her beauty spots for me," laughed Harrigan, "I like 'em thus sometimes."

"I thought your tastes were more Rubinesque," remarked the other, lifting his glass to ogle a couple of Norman-faced girls smiling at him, "how English these types are?"

Harrigan looked carelessly round too. "Most of them are remotely descended from English women," he answered, "though they are cursed virtuous. Be careful, remember that you are a prisoner. Do you see yonder piece in the hat and feather getting off that horse, she's worth a dozen of 'em—Biddy Dolan, a friend of mine, I'll present you. Oh by the way, when do you intend settling our little debt? the hundred still due to me over the Fitzgerald affair?"

"The Apostle Paul said there was a time for everything," replied Mr Gash, composedly. "Is not your request a shade importune?"

"It's always importune to pay a debt," retorted Harrigan, "unless it be a kiss to a pretty woman."

"Or a shot from behind a hedge," added Mr Gash, quietly. "But I think I can recollect having paid you some not inconsiderable sum a short time ago?"

"Aye in notes," replied the spy. "They are lighting pipes with such in Wexford town."

"Then, you ought buy up as many as you can, it should prove a good speculation," remarked Gash tranquilly.

"Take care; do you refuse to recognise my claim?" said Harrigan between his teeth.

"What if I do?" replied Mr Gash.

Harrigan smiled and directed an oblique glance at something that sat under a blanket near a tent, guarded by pikemen, something that had once been a loud-voiced, insolent-eyed atom of humanity, if the term could now be applied to the sightless thing huddled together in the pitiless sunlight.

"You should know better than to threaten," said Gash.

"Ecod, you're right, so I ought!" answered the other, showing his upper teeth. "I thought, however, there was honour among—comrades."

Gash laughed. "Like most proverbs, a concentrated form of mendacity," he rejoined. "But, you appear to forget that you yourself are a debtor to my forbearance—you recollect a little matter which happened in England last year?"

"No, nor regret it," retorted the other with an oath, "and what is there to prevent me from bettering it now?"

"The certainty of being hanged either as a rebel or a murderer," replied Gash, looking steadily at him, but including in the glance several of the Antrims standing near, "and the further fact that you would never see a penny of the money you describe as due."

Both men stared at one another, Harrigan laughed. "Ecod you're a cool one," he said. "You have the devil's impudence——"

"And the devil's luck," replied Mr Gash. "But you are too complimentary, I can simply borrow a little effrontery on occasion."

There was a slight stir amongst the multitude, and a movement took place towards a group of horsemen coming slowly through the crowded tent ways. The man who had been guard ran up hurriedly, wiping his mouth, Harrigan handed him the pike, and went also to the horsemen, the first of whom was waiving the shouting mob aside impatiently.

"You lost a great chance to-day," he said, "a chance

of getting Arklow, and all through this cursed drink. They remained in Gorey about the ale-houses instead of striking for Ireland——"

"We'll do better the next time!" roared a stentorian peasant.

"If you get the opportunity," replied Father John. "Ho there! Look to those gentlemen," he added, indicating some of the company, "Colonel Perry has suffered much from your enemies, and the least you may do is show him a little attention, you see the wretches pitch-capped him. Let me present you also Mr Esmond Kyan who will teach you to use your cannon. Ah, boys, if you had only kept up the spirit you showed at Tubberneering to-day—Well, it's your own loss, and God help us, the loss of Ireland!"

He dismounted, and Harrigan with some other officers approached, the spy showing a paper on which he had entered the names and regiments of the prisoners, Gash figuring there as "Captain Cook" of the Antrims. Having spoken with the priest in a low tone for a few minutes, he rejoined Gash standing with the captured soldiers under an augmented guard.

"Well, Captain," he said brusquely, "it is arranged that you are to be marched to Carrickbyrne Hill to-night, and kept prisoner there for the present—I suppose there is not much use in asking you to join us?"

"No, sir," replied Gash, in answer to a slight frown.

"Oh, come, come," expostulated Harrigan, winking at the others, and leading Gash apart, as if to argue at more length, "there are plenty of grand gentlemen with us—There's Colonel Perry, and Mr Aylmer up in Kildare and Father John Murphy. It's all right he whispered in a lower tone. "I'll go part of the way, we'll get you a horse too, I said your foot was hurt, and when Biddy Dolan gives you the wink, cut and run. Egad, it's as good as play, I got a hint just now that it would be better to leave the camp, for a certain young widow who has a great 'grau'

for me has just arrived, and I do not know the moment when I may be face to face with——"

"Kitty Creagh!"

The words were uttered, or rather hissed out, in a low tone of concentrated fury, and looking up, both men saw the woman herself standing beside them. Harrigan swore, Gash lifted his hat with an ironical smile.

"Well, and if that be your name, my dear, what have you to say to us?" observed Harrigan, recovering himself.

The woman did not answer, but went direct to Father Murphy, to whom she spoke with rapid earnestness of speech and gesture. The priest came forward, blank surprise upon his face, Harrigan meeting the glance with an admirable simulation of his perplexity.

"What does this mean?" he said, advancing a few paces, Kitty Creagh at his elbow.

"Upon my word, I cannot tell you," replied Harrigan.

"Speak out, woman!" said the priest, while several pikemen gathered near.

"What I have to say is this," said Kitty quietly. "The man before you is a traitor, and has been in the service of the Government before the rising, and many an arrest was made through his information."

"How do you know?" asked the priest, seeing that Harrigan did not reply.

"I saw him at the Hermitage," said Kitty Creagh.

There was a low growl of execration, the fame of that establishment having penetrated to Boolevogue.

Harrigan laughed. "A damned good place," he observed. "May we ask what you were doing there, yourself?"

"I was minding my own business," replied Kitty incautiously.

"I don't doubt it?" retorted Harrigan. "It's a nice place for an honest woman."

"Do you know this woman?" asked Father Murphy.

"Aye, to my sorrow," replied the spy. "She was my mistress."

Kitty Creagh spat in his face.

"Ask her," said Harrigan calmly, "where she spent the night of the twenty-seventh of May—the day before Oulart."

"At the Hermitage," cried the woman, "watching your devil's game."

"Ask her with whom she left the place?" pursued Harrigan.

"With an English officer who was a prisoner there," said Kitty. "The man you were watching and wanted to kill, you villain—I knew you well enough through the mask!"

Harrigan laughed again. "So I had a mask on," he said softly, holding Father John with one eye, "and at the same time I was swearing away the people's lives, an' the yeos were takin' up English officers, an' puttin' 'em in prison too—an' you leaven' 'em out I suppose! Arrah, go home and sleep off your spite. If I took your hand before Father Murphy there, and made an honest woman of you I wonder how long I'd be a blackguard!"

Kitty Creagh turned to the priest, her eyes sparkling with indignant tears. "Does anyone know the Saxons of Doorley's quarry?" she said, running her glance over the ring of expectant faces regarding her with semi-hostile interest.

There was no reply, most of those present being from Camolin, Ferns, and other northern towns.

"Is there any one of the United Irishmen here?" continued Kitty. There was no reply, the Society having made no great headway in Wexford where the priests had in obedience to Dr Troy's commands been opposed to it.

Harrigan laughed. "Tell me your company," he said, with a significant glance at Father John.

"Is Mr Francis Devereux here?" cried Kitty in a ringing tone.

There was silence again. One man said he thought Devereux was at Wexford, fighting the yeos, another, one of Harrigan's band, laughed, and said it was more likely he was fighting the girls.

"Is there anyone here knows this man or knows me?" continued the woman. "Is there anyone who was present when Malplaquet House was taken and Mr Neville kilt?"

The reference was unfortunate, the priest like most of the rebel leaders, being opposed to retaliation, though many, as in the case of Mr Fitzgerald, had lost considerably through the cowardly reprisals of their foes.

"Stay!" cried Kitty, pointing amid the crowd, "I know one of ye, whatever—make room for her!"

There was a slight stir, and an old woman hobbled forward, the rough men giving way before her with wonderful gentleness. It was Nancy.

"I know you," she said, "I hear tell of you: you are a dacent woman by all accounts."

"Thank you, honest woman," answered Kitty, "but do you know this fellow, Harrigan, look well!"

Nancy looked up, shading her eyes. "No then, I don't," she replied, "he is a stranger."

"Or the other?" cried Kitty.

Nancy looked long at Gash who believing his last hour had come met her keen glance calmly. There was a deep silence through which the lowing of cattle and the bleating of motherless lambs could be distinctly heard. In spite of himself, the spy's face sharpened with anxiety, the heavy shadows of the deep-set eyes darkening under the lowering brows. The sister of "Mrs Luttrell" looked upon the man for more than a minute, but her face expressed no recognition, as she turned to Father Murphy and said, "I don't know this gentleman, your reverence."

"I say in the presence of Almighty God," said Kitty Creagh, pale now, "that one of these men is Harrigan the spy, and the other Philip Gash, the greatest rogue unhung from this to Castlereagh!"

"What proof have you, woman?" asked Father John.

Kitty repressed an inclination to sob, turning to him, she poured forth the story of what transpired at the Hermitage, but she did not make any impression on the

triumphant peasants flushed with their victory, who had seen Harrigan that day leading them to glory.

The latter as if wearied by her recital, leaned against a table and taking up a guitar, touched a few chords that recalled a melody which goes up in sweet Seville when shadows of jessamine and orange fall slanting on white walls, and the great bells chime the "Ave Maria." The priest looked at him fixedly, Harrigan raised his head, and laid the guitar aside.

"Ye all know me," he said quietly, with the born orator's contempt for petty detail. "There is one here who should know me well, but who it seems has forgotten. You, Father Murphy, must have heard of my name at college, and although the authorities did not think me fitted for the dignity which you have reached, and sent me adrift on the world, yet I ask you, with all my faults and expulsion on my head, if you believe, readily, that I could stoop to be the paid spy of those whom I met in battle to-day? I am a spoiled priest? Grant it I am a broken man who has missed the rewards and the success of life? Grant it! Does it follow that I have fallen to the sin of Judas? I have been a lover of wine and women," he went on with a kind of proud humility, "and my sins are on my head, and it is for you, whose business it is to know the human heart, to guess what there was in my hard life to palliate my faults; but I ask you, are such men born traitors? I am one this poor woman says. Does my dress betoken it? Do traitors in Ireland wear thread-bare coats?—Evidently I have not fattened on the blood of my victims. I am a spy? Do spies dare the shock of battle, and tread the path of Glory?"

He spoke the words as they are set down, with folded arms, and then suddenly paused. There was a low murmur of sympathy, and soon a hoarse shout of "No, no, my poor man, true for ye!" A national tribute to the national taste for oratory.

"Someone just now spoke of a Mr Devereux," said Father Murphy. "Do you know him?" he continued addressing Nancy.

"Yis, yer reverence," replied the old woman. "He is at Corbet Hill where I came from to-day, glory be to God, him an' John Murphy of Loughnagreer."

"The heavens be your bed!" cried the grateful Kitty, "If you could get me sent there, sir," she continued, "I could prove my words—only these men should be sent too."

Here Harrigan who had been looking amongst the crowd, made a slight gesture, and a man whose face had still the mark of Heathcote's blow, stepped forward.

"I know this woman," he said, pointing to Kitty, "she was sutler to Plornish, the yeo, at the Hermitage. Will your reverence ask her if she knows the Gores?"

"Aye," answered Kitty, "I do."

"Ask her why was her husband kilt, and why was an honest man, my own cousin, hanged for the deed? Ask her wasn't he always hand and glove with the Orangemen —like herself—the double-faced thing?"

"My husband was kilt because the Orange dogs had spite in for me and him, and I wouldn't be in the country at all, but for Mr Neville's kindness, God reward him. And if I was in the company of dirt like Plornish, Mr Devereux and the United Irishmen know why," she continued, raising her voice in ungovernable rage, "they know the plotting and planning that has gone on for many a long day, and the work of that devil out of hell—Harrigan, and of the smiling devil beside him—I wonder what'll Miss Irene say to you when she knows what a cur you are—Gash? Aha, Gash the spy!"

Mr Gash stood silent, the struggle for self-control almost bursting the swollen veins upon his temples, but still he kept his head, though the mention of Irene's name made him sick to faintness. The priest's quick eye caught the light trace of effort which had forced itself to the set face, and he wondered if the accusing

woman's story were true. He bent his brows; the accents of truth were in her tones, but against all she had failed to prove, and in the face of Harrigan's courage that day her allegations sounded untenable. He looked hard at Harrigan whom he dimly remembered to have seen at the University, but his career had been a short one, nor would he have recollected his expulsion for drunkenness but for the man's own allusion to it, a fact which actually told in his favour. He glanced at his watch, yellow reflections were yet lingering about the windmill, its great sail idly wheeling in the evening breeze, but soft grey shadows were gently falling on plain and valley where the river ran as it runs to-day between its rustling woods. It was out of the question to send for Devereux, the charge, if it deserved attention at all, should be looked to at once, and it struck him that the plan proposed by the woman was the best. He looked upon Kitty Creagh who was at his side, wringing her hands, then he looked at Harrigan again.

"You appear to hesitate, sir," said the latter, "and I do not wonder, for the woman is a rare actress, indeed I believe one of her sisters is a playing woman in Dublin, but if you doubt my character, cast your eye over that letter." And he handed Father Murphy Miss Bird's missive.

The priest took and read the epistle carefully, then he looked over the edge at the distant country. The short guarded note merely inquired for the whereabouts of a man named Harrigan whom the Government wanted, its equivocal wording having instantly struck the spy when he reserved it.

"Bird?" said the priest. "I have heard the name before—a bad lot." Then he looked at the address.

"Aye," observed Harrigan, "and this dame is as good as the best of 'em. Do you know the fellow to whom it is written?"

Father Murphy shook his head.

"He's a ruffian in the North Cork, and I think that's

enough to say about him. This woman says I am known at the Castle," continued Harrigan, scorning petty detail, "well, it seems I am, like many another honest man those times."

Father John folded the letter and returned it. The stroke had been a bold but a successful one.

"Do you maintain your charge?" he said brusquely, addressing the woman.

"Yes, if it was my dying bed!" she replied.

"Then you shall go to Carrickbyrne Hill at once, with this old woman too," he said. "If your story be true, you will not want for witnesses, if it be untrue, I advise you to think well over the result of your action in the time yet remaining before the column starts. And you, sir," he continued, addressing Gash, "your rank and regiment?"

"Captain in the Antrims," replied that worthy.

Several members of the corps present among the prisoners now stepped forward and swore that Gash had been in the regiment since they could recollect. As the "Scotch mother" fiction was not of political or polemical value in those days, this temporary lapse from the strict truth may, perhaps, be condoned.

Father Murphy bent his brows; he heard murmurs amongst his half-disciplined command, impatient of delay, he felt the trend of opinion was with the accused, nor was it surprising, Kitty stood on one side, pale, round-eyed, her face wearing an expression which might have been construed into baffled malice, Harrigan stood opposite, his arms folded, the green cockade in his hat, splashes of English blood upon his boots, a masterly suggestion of conscious rectitude defying the fang of envy.

"I shall send Captain Cooke also," said the priest, motioning the woman to a tent. "And you," he went on, addressing Harrigan, "you must see for yourself that you cannot retain your command until this matter is cleared."

"I am quite willing to go as a prisoner," replied the other, his hand on his sword hilt.

"Keep your sword," answered Father Murphy. "We must assume a man innocent until he is proved guilty."

"I have experienced a slight injury to my foot," said Gash, "as I see horses here, may I ask if you will be good enough to allow me to ride thither?"

Father Murphy already engrossed in a report an aide had just handed to him, bowed gravely, and then retired to a tent, while the men who were to march sat at meat in a semi-circle on the slope. Harrigan who was not shunned by the officers, talking over the charges made against him with the easy phrases of an innocent man. Gash sat a little apart, bantering Biddy Dolan, and watching the sunlight linger on distant mountain peaks reflected in the gilded mirror.

At ten the column formed, and soon after marched, the two women in the middle, Gash riding between hedges of glinting pikes.

Their way led them through the heart of the country ravaged by the terrible war then raging from the mountains to the sea, but the merciful night hid its desolation, the smell of sweet meadow grass or the warmer perfume of clover suggesting only the peace of God's green country; sometimes hawthorn scent floated past on the evening breeze, and once the perfume of pinks from a wayside garden where a child was feebly calling on the night.

At intervals they encountered armed troops of peasants round blazing watch-fires, holding the cross-roads, and sometimes halted for an exchange of news. They had thus progressed three or four hours at a leisurely pace, the undisciplined advance guard straggling a few yards ahead when Gash who was chatting briskly with Biddy Dolan, the pert vivandiere, thought he heard the faint clink of accoutrements to the right, and looked cautiously at Harrigan whose face he could just discern in the growing twilight of the summer dawn. The latter lifted

his eyebrows, but made no further sign, and Gash concluded he had heard also.

In the distance there was a glow upon the sky at a point directly in front marking the camp of Carrickbyrne, and to the right another showing where the gallant Wexford men who had the day before beaten the outposts at Laken had halted on Corbet Hill, waiting for the dawn which should light them to the attack upon New Ross itself, the key to Waterford and the south of Ireland.

"There's a power of people over there I am told," remarked the leader of the party, a grave sententious man who carried his neck stiffly.

"I don't doubt it," replied Harrigan, "and every one of 'em a Bonaparte, by G—d!"

"Oh, they're not that all out yet," replied the other who felt that his companion was sarcastic, "but they are as ready to die for the cause as twenty Boneys, an' 'tis they'll establish the fine Irish Republic one of those days you'll see."

"What have you to say against the King?" asked Harrigan.

"Nothing," answered the other heartily, "he is a decent man I'm tould, but I'm thinkin' that as we have our hand in it, we'd be more comfortable with a republic."

"Yes, an' every parish priest in the country an emperor," sneered Harrigan, "and whisky flowing in the gutters all the year round. Wouldn't that suit ye—eh?"

"Oh, begor there was too much whisky going at Gorey to-day," said the peasant, "for after we drove the sojers out, the boys were like flies about the public houses, an' the devil wouldn't get them to go up to Arklow."

"Yerrah, where would they be going?" said Harrigan, tucking his sword under his arm, "sure they can another day, when all the liquor at Gorey is drunk."

"Yes, but war that would not be," responded the other, "an' now we're in the field."

"Are we?" replied Harrigan innocently. "By the

powers that's the first I heard of it! Like the madness of the gaoler's daughter in Sherry's play, it's the blank verse first made me suspect it. Do your patriotic friends still bite off the bullets from the cartridges lest they'd injure the good English who are so much afraid of hurting 'em?"

"Oh, indeed, Mr Harrigan, we know a bit better nor that now," retorted the man, shifting his pike, "we could tell if artillery an' foot were marchin' on our flank, even if we couldn't see 'em."

Again the faint metallic clink struck Gash's ear, and Biddy Dolan began to sing "Shule aroon," riding a little before the prisoner, the disorderly files straggling apart in the narrow road bordered by low, broken fences, and the leader called sharply to her to desist. Biddy turned petulantly in her saddle and struck the horse smartly, so that the men shrank aside as the animal reared, at the same instant she nodded towards a gap and glanced at Gash who the next was speeding across an adjoining field before one of his escort could divine what had occurred.

"Bad cess to you an' your horse!" cried the leader, "'tis damned easy to know what you are, there's neither luck nor grace with ye! Quick, quick, scatter over the fences and stop him I say!"

Instantly the men scrambled over the fence side and spread out, running almost as fast as Biddy's charger, she herself leading the pursuit and shouting shrilly, despite the warnings addressed to her. Harrigan springing on the broken fence, fired a pistol shot, holding the muzzle upward, and then another; there came a single musket in answer, then a scattered volley.

"Soldiers!" he cried, "they must be going to New Ross."

"Yes," observed the captain calmly, "I heard 'em a while ago, but said nothing for the boys haven't guns, but I was just going to make that fellow get down when the girl began to sing. Here, bugler, sound that trumpet of

yours, there's no use in havin' the men shot by the soldiers before their time."

Harrigan reloaded his pistol, whistling softly. The call was obeyed and soon the pursuers returned with Biddy cursing fluently because a stray bullet had swept the plume from her hat, and across the shadowy fields they could now make out the gleam of bayonets a little less than a quarter of a mile's distance.

"Are those women all right?" cried Harrigan, "they may give us the slip too."

"There's not much chance of that!" cried Kitty Creagh, "how damned well it was planned!"

"Who planned what?" screamed Biddy. "I didn't say a word to him that ye couldn't all hear. I suppose you are bitter black because you can't slip off yourself after the lies you told on Steve Harrigan."

"Arrah, hold your tongue," retorted Kitty disgustedly, "it isn't to you I'm talking, I wouldn't soil my mouth by speaking to the likes of you!"

"By my soul, if I thought it was a trick you wouldn't ride another yard, my damsel!" cried the captain, who appeared to be a virtuous young man, and consequently inclined to drastic measures with the frail if fair sex. "We have traitors enough as it is."

"Here, here, enough said," interrupted Harrigan anxiously. "All this talk will only show the Sassenach robbers where we are. Do you mark that?" And as if to point the wisdom of the speech, another volley sent pieces of furze on an adjacent fence top flying.

The leader gave the order to fall in and they resumed their march to Carrickbyrne now rising before them, where Nancy and Kitty were immured in a barn belonging to one King. On making inquiries, the detail found that Harvey had moved to Corbet Hill with his staff, and thither most of the men set out at once with Harrigan in their company, but by the time they reached it, mightier events had effaced the recollection of Kitty Creagh and her accusations.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE party into whose company Mr Gash had fallen proved a belated contingent of the Dublin Militia which had lost its way, but now under the spy's guidance, drew off from the dangerous neighbourhood, and although in a country held by the enemy, succeeded in evading their frequent outposts, timely notice being almost invariably given by the flaring watch-fires and the songs of convivial or patriotic complexion being sung around them.

Owing to the devious course they were obliged to pursue it was daylight when they were skirting Laken, and while advancing at a tired trot along a borheen an incident which seemed the prelude of an attack threw them into momentary confusion, for down a curving field a horseman came galloping through the bracken, a horseman whose blue coat and silver epaulets they could distinguish plainly. It was Devereux. He was riding with a loose rein, and took a fence at a reckless pace which showed how urgent was his haste, a splatter of carbine shots rattling off to windward as he came. He saw them instantly, and deflecting his advance, spurred towards a gap giving on the lane, flashing out his sword at the same moment, and shouting in stentorian tones—"Now, boys, we have 'em! Charge!"

In an instant the main body halted, noting thankfully that he was in the line of the advance guard now running back, the helmets of troopers showing over the rise of the ground he had just topped.

"A ruse!" roared Gash, "Stop him! Devereux, the French spy!"

The cry came too late, he was across the road even

while the men in pursuit were taking breath to yell in nasal tones—"Stop the croppy!" a trooper on a splendid grey horse forging ahead of his companions. The militiamen faced round and fired a foolish volley which if well directed, would have riddled the second horseman now closing on the man in the blue coat, the other soldiers cantering forward at a slower pace.

"Yon's a deed mon," shouted one, "see, his mare's blown, and Alan's saddle-skirts with 'em!"

It was even so, for soon the grey steed was neck-a-neck with the panting roan bestridden by the fugitive, the rider rising in the stirrups already for the blow which should end the race. The man in the blue coat did not look round once, but headed madly up the swell of the ground billowing away to Corbet Hill. His sword rose with a slow, slicing movement past his straining horse's head, and then as if guiding its motion by the action rather than the eye, his left hand tightened the rein so that his charger actually inclined towards that of his pursuer who lifted his arm, the sabre blade flashing in the sunlight. As their stirrup irons rang together the fugitive turned suddenly in his saddle, the watching sword making a swift upward cut; there was the jar of steel, a vicious thrust under the scarlet arm raised again; a hoarse cry, answered by a taunting laugh rang out and the lagging troopers as if actuated by one impulse sprang into a gallop.

The grey and brown steeds were running apart now, the latter speeding with redoubled energy towards an open gate where an outpost clustered to open a perfectly harmless fire upon the soldiers, halting again as the grey steed galloped towards them in an arc, the rider swaying in the saddle his hands clutching at his severed throat.

Devereux did not spare his horse, but rode on towards Corbet Hill swearing a fiery French oath as he heard the echo of a drinking song from the direction of the paling watch-fires. Presently he passed a picket who cheered

him by way of challenge, and was soon within the insurgent lines, if such a term could be applied to the irregular encampment scattered over the sides. Dismounting, he advanced towards a tent pitched with a certain degree of orderliness; as he did so a gentleman emerged and looked somewhat unsteadily on the morning. It was Mr Harvey who had been entertaining some guests as the still-lighted interior and the silver glittering on the table within showed.

"Hah, Devereux," he said impatiently, "will Gaffney be able to take post on the Kilkenny side?"

"I hope so," replied the officer, "I reached Glenmore about three hours ago and had an interview with him; he had no troops under arms, and complained of the shortness of the notice, he says the men are scattered over the district he commands, some of them being actually engaged every day on a house at Annagh. He did not appear very sanguine."

"I trust you made it clear that we were to attack to-day?" said Harvey, taking a pinch of snuff. "I wrote 'to-morrow' distinctly in my letter."

The officer's face fell. "Yes," he replied slowly, "but as I have been obliged to make various detours going and indeed coming, it was near one this morning when I reached his house. If you think there is the possibility of a misunderstanding, I shall return at once and make it plain."

"Nonsense," answered Harvey, "sit down and have your breakfast, man; even if they do mistake, they must hear the firing and see the smoke."

"I should hardly dare to trust to that," Devereux replied, as he stamped to and fro in his wet boots. "There was firing enough to wake the dead yesterday, and yet no one appeared to be on the alert over there now, save at Rosbercon where the English have taken post already. I swam the river twice unchallenged. Those Kilkenny folk must see ere they will believe."

Harvey put his hands behind his back and swept the long expanse of awakening landscape to the left across the Barrow on towards Glenmore.

"Egad," he said, "there is something in what you say. They should be accustomed to firing by this. Johnson has been at it I am told for some time past, musketry and cannon from the companies on the shore and gun-boats on the river; he is terribly afraid of having his communication with Waterford cut off—no more eggs and bacon, ha, ha. But, have breakfast first, we don't attack for some time yet, and I hope shall not have to attack at all. There are men enough to take the place twice over, here," he continued looking round on the hill spangled with reviving watch-fires.

"Aye, General," replied Devereux seating himself at a table where *sub jove* a plentiful repast had been prepared by a pretty girl, one Mary Doyle. "But they will want more leaders than we have at our disposal; and they will want discipline," he added, thinking of the outposts.

"Pshaw, mere force of numbers will do it, if nothing else," answered Harvey, "I shall, however, write to Johnson, and give him the chance of retiring; there will be ample time for him to reply before the attack is delivered." And he returned to the tent, passing his hand across his eyes.

"Well, Captain, you were out early this morning?" said a young man taking a chair at the table. "We shall have some hot work to-day, yesterday was a mere exercise."

"Egad, Mr Furlong, we have been celebrating it as if it were a world-changing victory," replied Devereux. "Our friends, the enemy, do not seem inclined to let us have it all our own way; coming hither this morning I was chased by some of their cavalry out reconnoitring, and had like to be taken prisoner under the eye of our own pickets. They appear to be keenly alive to the

value of yonder town, and if their people be resolute, we'll have a stern fight of it, even now, men are being drafted in; hah! there's a gun. Listen to the revielle! They were going the rounds when I passed last night, they must have been under arms all the time."

"Well, so were our men too," laughed another officer who had just come up and paid a compliment to Mary Doyle. "But there has not been much going the rounds, save the rounds of the looted wine casks. Ha, ha, ha! God knows, I wonder how they can stand it, and fight too, yet my fellows are as right as trivets."

"Oh, Kelly, your pikemen may be relied on," observed another as he took his seat, "though I am not so sure of my good friends yonder. They were drinking when I went to sleep last night and singing when I awoke; God grant they won't be sleeping to-day when we are fighting. The English have pushed their posts close in again, our people are beginning to look a little alive too."

It appeared so, the long straggling camp was now thoroughly awake, the hillside actually covered by an irregular spiral of people ascending to the summit, perhaps when including the multitudes of women and children, some twenty thousand, most of them being armed in one fashion or another, some were stretching themselves and yawning in the fresh morning air, others hanging about the pots simmering on the countless camp fires, others strolling in groups within the vague limits of their barony standards fluttering gaily here and there; all were either singing or talking.

"We are to attack upon three points simultaneously," observed the new-comer, Captain Cloney. "They will probably hold the town as long as they can, but once those men get to push of pike, God help the slinking hounds."

Just then Mr Harvey came from his tent, a letter in his hand, and beckoned Furlong.

"Take this at once to General Johnson, if there be

any difficulty about seeing him, ask for Mr Tottenham. Have you a flag of truce there?" he said.

"Faith we have not, unless the table-cloth," replied Kelly. "We have had little occasion for such an article until now, and I hope the breakfast will be over before the messenger is sent, at any rate."

The officers laughed too. "I shall take my handkerchief," answered Furlong, crossing to a couple of horses tethered near, one of which a shock-headed lad was rubbing down to the tune of "Pensive; O Dove."

"Do," said Harvey. "They cannot fail to see it, and you will not have far to go, in any case; yonder are their pickets."

Quickly mounting, Furlong rode away through the long files which unthinkingly cheered him as he went, in sheer good humour.

"If Johnson will not listen to reason, the fault of the sacking of the town will not lie at our doors, observed Harvey, sauntering over to where the officers sat. "I am sorry that we have not more of your excellent cavalry, Colonel Cloney, you gave a good account of yourselves yesterday."

"I am equally sorry," replied Cloney as he demolished a chicken, "but there are some splendid nags over amongst those dragoons, so we shall have a pretty full establishment presently, though I would prefer one regiment of half trained, well-armed foot made up of such men as I could pick out yonder, than all the cavalry in the three kingdoms. However, once we get to the other side of that fine bridge Cox built lately, we will not stop until we reach Cork, egad, with only shank's mare—that is if the Kilkennys are ready to keep Johnson's cut-throats moving."

"Then, you don't think he will surrender?" observed Harvey.

"I do not," answered Cloney, "because if he did not think the place tenable he would have slipped out last

night after the affair at Lacken; besides, see how far he has thrown his outposts."

"What is your opinion, Mr Devereux?" asked the General.

"He will fight to the death," replied that officer confidently, "even now they are pointing cannon round by those towers to the east and south, 'tis a good disposition, though I see he has neglected to level the fences, an oversight which may cost him the place as it cost 'dirty Shamus' the Boyne. In one way, it is lucky we have so many people here, since I see the affair must be carried out by the pike."

Harvey frowned and lifted his epauletted shoulders. "Then we shall have heavy losses," he said, striking a boot heel on the turf impatiently. "However, once we are in——"

"Aye, that will be the time," said Kelly, "if we can close the gates until the storming party has done its work the town will be ours by twelve o'clock. Five hundred disciplined men would clear it. Possibly the English will take post at Rosbercon, but our cannon and those yonder which will be in our hands then will sweep the bridge and dislodge them. Then——"

"Oh the Kilkenny men will do the rest," said Harvey.

Devereux laughed. "With the Kilkenny folk it will be, I fear, the foolish anagram: 'Rise and we will assist, assist and we will rise,'" he observed, "Ah, there is Mr Furlong."

The newly risen sun was now brightening the eternal blue above, and gilding the expanse of green country around, showing the pretty walled town, set amid the groves of Summerhill and Rosemount, against whose green towered the ruins of Mountgarret Castle, while below the Barrow shone silvery under the rolling woods and spreading pastures to the west. Across from Rosbercon they could hear the long notes of the bugle, and all along the circuit of the walls the cheerful tapping

of the drum, while rising gallantly from the quays where the cavalry were posted the haughty music of the trumpet gave welcome to the day.

From where the officers sat they could discern the interlacing roads just outside the town; on one of them Furlong was riding rapidly, holding his white handkerchief aloft so that they could see it over the wayside bushes at intervals.

Suddenly the sunlight caught farther down the same road the dull gleam of musket barrels and the sharper flash of shako brasses as a small group of red-coats moved out from the shadow of a fence, several people on the hill paused in their sauntering and looked also, a man who was singing stopped in the middle of a verse and watched the glittering things as he lazily rubbed the knife-like head of his pike.

One of the red figures stepped out from the line and lifted his piece, the musket barrel making a spot of light upon the grey road, then a puff of white hid the upper portion of his body. and a single report, strangely audible through the murmur of many voices throbbed on the morning air. The horseman galloped forward. A moment later the scarlet coat and cross belts reappeared, the man was leaning forward, peering through the shredding smoke; the other man on the horse began to sway, the white handkerchief fluttering from his grasp to be caught on a trailing bough of wild rose where it hung waving as the light breeze blew. The horse seeing the soldiers across the road, changed his pace to a jogging trot which made the rider jolt in the saddle, and finally slip from it to the ground where he lay in the dust on his back, both arms extended, a still, white face turned upward to the sky in whose illimitable heights the song of a lark was quivering.

The soldiers stepped forward now, one catching the horse; the others approached the body, their bayonets levelled, while a corporal sank on his knee beside the

prostrate form, and began with professional method to rifle the pockets.

A great silence spread swiftly over Corbet Hill, the clanking of the officers' scabbards jarring unpleasantly as they left the table and came forward to have a clearer view. The pickpockets had now found the letter, and one, who had been spelling the address, looked upward, a grin upon his dog-like face. Then a low mutter rose along the hillside ashine with pike heads, and swelled into a roar of execration which sent the red-coats slouching into cover of the fences, but in sight of all the rigid form lay still, the white face looking upward.

"There's civilisation for you!" said Cloney, who had already sprung to his saddle. "Gad, I believe they mean to attack us," he added, and a volley crashed through his words.

The people were falling into something resembling military order by this, priests moving between the ranks, their vestments glistening as they went. Just below, fresh knots of scarlet appeared upon the dusty road, then others across the fields, each group supporting the next; another volley rattled out, and a perfect babel succeeded the ominous stillness. Cloney's horse now fell, struck by a spent bullet, the people shouting as the steed regained his legs, the loud rolling cheer giving soldier-like answer to the flaunting trumpet calls.

"Colonel Kelly," said Harvey sharply, "take some men and drive in those outposts yonder."

Kelly hastened away, and presently reappeared, having got together some five hundred effective pikemen, while numbers of men ran to and fro, hanging on the irregular column, and roaring for revenge.

"Remember," cried Harvey, making his voice heard with difficulty amid the tumult, "that you are to force those dogs within the walls of the town, that you are not to pursue too closely, but take post along the fences, and gall the artillery—where are the riflemen?"

"They are coming, sir," replied Kelly, who was besieged by scores of vapouring men brandishing their pikes, and through the press toiled perhaps two hundred armed with muskets of various pattern, some loading their pieces even now.

A chill passed over the general, and springing to his horse he rode forward, lifting his hand for silence, but the eddying crowd, either mistaking his gesture or grasping at it as a signal to advance, began to march at a constantly accelerating pace down the hill, whilst a sharp volley stung its disorderly length. The march became a trot, then a run, and the column without any pretence of obeying Kelly, who roared to the riflemen at the outposts to join the crowd, poured on over ditches, fences, scrub and broken ground at the base, the English falling back slowly, but firing always into the advancing mass, and rarely without effect.

On ran the column, a few musketeers rushing recklessly in front, firing at intervals, a troop of the same cavalry which had nearly captured Devereux that morning galloping confusedly only some yards ahead, seeking for a road of retreat, and almost outdistanced by the fleet pikemen speeding across the fields in a long curving line.

There appeared to be disorder amongst the soldiery now, the rapidity of the advance not having been calculated on, and a half-hearted attempt to form a square was made at a fence, but ere a single cartridge could be bitten the advance guard of the insurgents was upon them, and had sent their decimated survivors flying madly towards the different gates, while with a mighty roar the Irish torrent thundered on over fence and ditch, meadow and standing corn, the royal cannon roaring in answer as the deluge foamed nearer, gaps riven in its width at every stride only to be instantly filled ere the bloody round shot had ploughed to rest. Soon the last barrier was left behind, and with a heart-lifting cheer the heedless multitude flung itself upon the vomiting guns.

"Good God!" cried Harvey, who had watched through a glass, "where's the sense in that? How can they carry those gates without cannon? Where is Colonel Cloney?"

"Yonder, sir, getting his men together," shouted a man named Forrestal, who was bringing up a gun to which an artillery man was fastened by a rope, while behind lumbered another piece of ordnance on a dray, mounted *en barbette*, as Devereux said.

"Where are you taking that gun?" cried Harvey, who ought to have known.

"Round by the Priory Gate, sir," answered the other; "we have a notion that we can get in that way by the quay. That Three Bullet Gate yonder is a regular castle. Any orders, sir?"

"No," replied Harvey, "except to keep your men under control, and wait until we are all together, and the other division at the Maiden Tower—Good heavens, Kelly's men have spoiled everything."

Forrestal glanced at the man on horseback, the glass glued to his eye. "My sowkins!" he muttered, "but you're the purty leader—blamin' every one instead of takin' a hand in the game an' makin' the best of it. Well, we won't do much by standin' here. Come, boys, easy with the gun down the road and across Summerhill."

"See," cried Harvey, as Cloney came up to receive his final orders, "I knew how it would be; they have set the cavalry at 'em in the open ground, and the idiots will be cut off in flank and rear. Stay," he continued, "there's an officer haranguing them—I know him, Lord Mountjoy, Luke Gardiner, you know—married one of the Montgomery girls—an honest man. God in heaven, the savages killed him!"

He alluded to a thin stream of horsemen which wound silently out from one of the gates, crossing the silent guns, an officer who had ridden far ahead towards the insurgent line having been stabbed as he halted and strove to address the advancing crowd.

Almost at the same moment the cavalry with a shrill cheer charged, and riding well together struck the oncoming multitude like a wall. For several seconds the flash and wheeling gleam of swords played lightning-like to and fro amongst the dark masses, who unable to form clambered back over the fences towards which they were driven pitilessly. But Kelly standing on a wall ranged the long pikes in order, while the muskets spat death at the hacking troopers, who ere another minute had elapsed were transformed into a tossing, disorganised trail of men, as they reeled back from the deadly steel and retired towards the gate whence they had emerged, leaving the peasants entrenched behind the fences, the royal cannon waking again across the green fields sprinkled with dead and dying.

"Very well," remarked Devereux, who had also watched the affair, "that will be a lesson. I have seen such things occur before, but never saw undisciplined troops rally like that. Dieu! they would make matchless soldiers after a month's training. Oh, the pity of it. Aha, here are the runagates," he added, as a veritable multitude of white-faced men came tearing back along the roads towards the hill, up which they swarmed presently, rushing hither and thither between the women, whose brainless clamour shrieked in ready response to the palpitating story of the trembling drunkards.

"Shall we advance, sir?" said Cloney, "I am afraid things do not look promising, but if we bide here the runaways will infect the others, their women are around them as it is."

Mr Harvey was not blessed with much tact as his helplessness in the face of the woful disarrangement of his plans showed, and he could not affect a confidence he did not feel. The thought came to him to order a general attack upon every gate in the walls, while he with a chosen band would cross the Barrow above the town by any means at hand and unexpectedly menace it from the Kilkenny side.

For one instant he saw the possibilities clearly and had he acted on the impulse he would in all human probability be a heroic figure now, but he was dejected by what he had seen, his power over the mob was of the slightest and his physical weakness made him exaggerate the extent of the defection. He forgot, or rather did not know that one act of self-assertion promptly carried out at a critical moment would influence his countrymen more than a dozen admirably considered plans which were at the mercy of an accident. The same thought struck the other men, and they looked at him, but Mr Harvey only put out his under lip.

"You might as well deliver the attack," he said addressing Cloney, "though it's all one now. How many men have you, Mr Devereux?"

"Some score," replied the officer, "but they can be relied on."

"Oh, can they," said Mr Harvey pettishly, "I am glad to hear it, take them yonder, and see what you can do with 'em; post them as advantageously as you can, so that we may be able to get some intelligence of how the business goes on. After that see what you can do, help Cloney."

Devereux saluted, and clattered away in the wake of his comrade's pikemen, whistling gaily, or flinging sprightly taunts at the white-cheeked girls telling him he would be murdered "below there." He was hopeful again, his training having taught him the true lesson of the charge and the repulse—that men who had flung themselves upon so prepared a foe with such reckless valour, and had sustained such a shock unbroken must carry the place, come what would. After? Well, that like all other human things, lay at the knees of the gods.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Devereux reached the battle-ground some minutes later, he found a scene of turmoil to which in all his experience he never witnessed a parallel. Along the roads in the immediate vicinity of Three Bullet Gate and by the groves of Summerhill pikemen were thronging, their heavy masses thrown into relief momentarily by clouds of smoke, pearl-grey on the upper edges, dazzlingly white on the lower, as the King's cannon belched forth and the King's musketry crackled from every loop-hole and point of vantage on the walls; cannon too was to be heard on the Irish side, but the reports were infrequent, and the quality of the powder could be guessed from the weakness of the detonation. Still, though held in check, the brave peasants did not flinch, but deploying slowly by the fence sides, replied to the fire with a precision which has not received adequate acknowledgment in the official returns, so that just as Devereux came up the waiting cavalry swept out again, spread abroad fan-like—not a moment too soon, for a furious rush was being made as they formed—and charged with a shout.

The assailants did not attempt to stand, but wheeling round, dashed for the nearest hedges, the troopers thundering behind met by a deadly fusilade, while the pikemen entrenching themselves determinedly drove them back from the fences which they vainly endeavoured to make their horses leap, though one of their cornets led them on gallantly, only to die as his comrades died at Old Kilcullen by the church on the hill. Towards the right flank too there was shouting as the cavalry charged, and cheering as they fell back, cheering drowned by the

roar of cannon which had just re-opened, and as the insurgents dashed forward again Devereux saw with amusement a captain of dragoons, whose steed had been shot, extricate himself from the body by catching hold of the flying traces of an artillery horse pounding past through the smoke and clamour.

Seeing that his men were useless here, Devereux posted them so that they might serve as messengers to and from distant parts of the field, being thus the means of having one or two of the least ineffective guns possessed by the Irish forces brought into action against the royal artillery, one piece of which they silenced.

Guided by redoubled shouting, he spurred round to the Three Bullet Gate where Cloney was indignantly haranguing his reckless and inattentive command who stumbling and staggering hither and thither utterly regardless of the dozens disabled at every discharge, were sadly impeding the movements of the disciplined men, some five or six hundred, upon whom the real brunt of the fighting fell. At the same moment Kelly, whose face was already dark with powder, seized his bridle.

"Just the man I want!" he cried; "we can't carry the Gate, our best men are dropping on every side. Go over to the fields where the cattle are, bring as many as you can collect everywhere, drive 'em back and we'll do the rest, those men with me are the bravest in the army, I cannot hold them in, and the cannon will decimate 'em as they rush between those high fences. The rest cannot be trusted yet, I know their temper well."

At the words Devereux rode slowly away, not to give excuse for retreat, because he noticed several watching him over their shoulders while Kelly hastened back to his men shouting—"Wait a minute, boys, I have sent Captain Devereux for reinforcements."

"Cavalry, eroo?" laughed one binding a bloody wrist.

"Yes," answered Kelly, "country cavalry!" And a

discharge of cannister struck down three men as they laughed at the joke.

Once clear of the fight, Devereux broke into a gallop, flying with a few horsemen towards the skirts of Corbet Hill where cattle were grazing, and shouting his orders to those in charge, drove off as many as could be gathered at a moment's notice, meeting a rabble of men scurrying back from the combat with the news that all was lost. A few had intelligence enough to understand the stratagem, the others delighted at the new diversion, fell to goading the animals on with their spears.

"Hurrah," shouted Kelly as the new contingent made its appearance. "Hurrah! My soul from hell! I thought you'd never come. Now, boys, close up with the pikes and send 'em through the Gate!"

"Close up with the pike!" The words rang trumpet-like above the din, and maddened by the pike prods, the mass of cattle rushed blindly towards the fatal entrance curtained by rolling smoke; clouds rent every now and then, as the cannon flashed its iron storm on the Irish ranks, and behind came a column of peasants, dropping at intervals as the English marksmen picked them down, but no more retarding their dash than a stone flung into a flowing river bars the current.

"Hardly work for a general of division?" said Kelly, laughing.

"No," replied Devereux, "though certainly as dignified as stirring up the earth with a stick in order to throw dust in your enemy's eyes—what some heroes were not above doing I believe. Dieu!"

A six pound shot had struck his horse, killing the creature instantly, but as it sank he extricated himself. "Lucky I had my pistols in my belt!" he cried, drawing his sword and hurrying on beside the wavering ranks.

The roads by the Gate were now thronged by men heading off the cattle as the poor beasts, frenzied by the din, and pelted by grape-shot, were forced towards

the yawning archway where the gunners, stripped to their shirts, were sponging, ramming and firing swiftly, some of them bleeding from the nose owing to the frequent concussions, while behind, the supports with fixed bayonets were steadily closing up.

All this Devereux saw for one second, the next, the surging herd choked the entrance, actually smothering the cannon, a few breaking past the soldiers and staggering into the town to fall moaning in the gutters, poor unreasoning martyrs, the first of the insurgent force which entered the town of New Ross.

"Now Shielmalier die or do!" roared Kelly, flinging himself at a knot of yeomen, one of whom blew the hat from his head as he spoke, sinking cloven through shoulder-strap and cross-belt. "Give 'em the steel! Remember your debts!"

They did remember, and paid many a long-standing one with pike point and musket butt till the soldiery broke and ran, though grim fighters, and were pursued and piked without the mercy which was but too often shown on other occasions. Many, however, took refuge in the tower above and a few houses adjoining, unnoticed in the mad whirling tumult, and a fresh force of infantry hastening forward, met the insurgents gallantly. But, the latter keeping touch, steadily drove them along a street leading directly from the Gate, for the guns there were in Irish hands now, and despite their numbers, and discipline, the English recoiled with horrid incidents of slaughter at every step. Then a new tide of assailants rushing round from the Broguemaker's Tower swept in, some dashing down Cross Lane, leading from the left to Friary Street to meet those storming the Priory Gate, others reinforcing the first detachment, and the Three Bullet Gate was won after three hours' incessant fighting, won from a disciplined foe, well armed and posted, won by a valour which would have dinned into the world's ears had its like been found amongst a Monmouth's stolid ploughmen or a Cromwell's whining horde.

On drove the gory column, the remnant of the frantic cattle plunging far ahead on as far as Church Lane, where two swivel guns ended what bullet and bayonet had begun.

There was now the sound of shrieking in the streets, and women could be seen flying madly towards Mary Street past the barrack where the English flag flew yet, hastening for the bridge that led to the Kilkenny side where amid the beeches and sycamores of Rosbercon Eustace held his position, there was the sound of firing too from the north in the direction of Market Gate where the lane called "Borheen na slawn" from the slaughter of that terrible day, was growing slippery with blood. Little parties of regulars and yeomen could be noted retiring slowly behind the swivels by the church, and already the guard around the usual batch of prisoners in the gaol and at the Market House were threatening murder, which they would have wrought, but for the timely and courageous interposition of a Quaker who chanced to be amongst them.

There was the crackling of flames as well as the rattle of musketry in the air now, heavy clouds of smoke from burning houses in Friary Street stealing up the slanting town to mingle with other wreaths that rose on the placid morning air from those by the Three Bullet Gate whence fresh pikemen were hastening.

The retreating soldiers fought stubbornly, posting themselves in the houses along Neville Street, opening a deadly fire, but the resistless insurgents were close upon them, and soon a savage hand-to-hand combat took place in the passages, halls and rooms, the roar of the gun up at the Market Place where Johnson himself was, answering those by the gaol as the Irish thundered down Mary Street and the winners of the Priory Gate forced their way, fighting yard by yard, up along the quays, despite the fierce charges of the cavalry under Heathcote, who quickly saw that he was merely covering the retreat of the troops who were being slowly but surely dislodged, many

already hurrying across the bridge, the chief brunt of the fighting falling on the cavalry pent up in the narrow streets who charged the pikemen at intervals, but were met and hurled back with the deadly pike or shot down by the carbines of the dead dragoons which Mary Doyle had taken together with the cartridge boxes, and handed to her friends.

Above the tumult, the long-drawn notes of the retreat sounded by order of Johnson, rang out gratefully to the broken foot, and they poured in answer by twos and threes and squads and companies down Bridge Street, ascream with their blasphemies as they jostled in the rush for the other side, a rush that was not stopped in many instances until some hours later, when they met the Roscommon regiment from Waterford, and told their tale of disaster.

It was now past eight o'clock, and most of the town was in the hands of the Irish, though a few defenders pent up at the Three Bullet Gate had not surrendered nor had the main guard where Sergeant Hamilton and fifteen of the Donegals stood to their guns gallantly. There were guns too in Church Lane near the Market Place, but these were isolated posts, the lanes and streets around and between being held by the insurgents who now began to disperse in search of breakfast. News of their success had by this time reached Corbet Hill with its thousands of inactive spectators, and soon streams of carts were *en route* for the Priory and Three Bullet Gates to collect plunder, being mostly under the control of self-appointed commissaries who had already proved themselves pests to the United Army during its short period of existence. With those came the inevitable train of half-witted, half-drunken camp followers, who were responsible for most of the outrages so carefully treasured up against the insurgents, and who always helped to swell the "numbers" of the enemy in official despatches, and last and worst, the scum of the Wexford

quays, the bullies of the cock-pit and the tavern, who that eventful day showed signally how little physical courage depends upon physical strength. But amongst them Devereux saw very few reliable fighting men to fill the gaps caused by the severe struggle at the Gate and in the streets; however, hoping for the best, he set to work on the matters most urgently needed, the first being to provide for the relief of the wounded, who were brought to a slated house at the corner of Mary Street to receive whatever rude help could be procured. Next, he hastened to extinguish the flames already blazing as far as Mill Lane at the entrance, but through the veering smoke-clouds rolling up the tilted little town the English flag flew still, and the sound of distant firing was fitfully heard from Irishtown where Vandeleur held his ground.

As he was directing a detail at work on a house threatened by fire in Neville Street he saw at a neighbouring window a face which took him back to the May evening, centuries ago it seemed, in the orchard of Malplaquet House—the face of Irene Neville. He lifted his hat and approached the door, but in an instant all that had passed since flashed upon him and he drew back with a sigh. Yet, he could not avoid looking up again. She stood still by the window, her hand to her mouth, her brows contracted, looking out upon the busy scene, without a trace of anxiety, her beautiful face whiter by contrast with the black robe she wore.

Directing a few pikemen to guard the house lest it should be entered by plunderers, he turned away just as Mary Doyle came running up Mary Street to tell him that Major Johnson was alone on the bridge from which the insurgents had been beaten back, calling on the troops to follow "their countryman." Down by Church Lane there was vociferous cheering, and Devereux saw in the distance active figures busy, straining and heaving about a gun posted there.

At the moment he had no more than perhaps a score

of men ready for the sudden call, but he formed them as best he could, sending at the same time a message to Cloney and some other leaders, while dauntless Mary Doyle stepped on to the corner of Neville Street, a drum slung over her shoulder, which she tapped into spirit-stirring music, shouting—"Fall in, fall in, the fight's not done yet, boys!" the brattle of grape rattling against house railing and shuttered shop front almost drowning her brave voice.

Yes, the fight was not done yet. The troops were coming back, down from Rosbercon, across the bridge, up Maiden Lane and Market Street, led by the Dublin Militia eager to revenge the fall of Lord Mountjoy, the one English officer who died undeservingly that day, one of the very few who merited the honour of a soldier's death.

Mingled with the solitary drum taps came the ringing notes of a bugle, and soon a fresh body of insurgents headed by Kelly of Killane, dashed gallantly up, and to the martial music of musket and cannon, taunting trumpet and screaming fife, the fight began anew. But through it all the strenuous tapping of Mary Doyle's drum went on, down the long streets, as it comes to us still down the long century, hopeful and alert, a presage of the weary struggle which has never failed a woman's voice to cheer, or a woman's hand to point the way.

At first the troops marching shoulder to shoulder, won the northern streets already in the possession of the insurgents, dozens of drunken men reeling out of the taverns along the route to be bayoneted pitilessly; but though taken at a terrible disadvantage, the Irish rallied steadily, the musketeers husbanding their slender stock of powder as they stood at the windows or doorways, dwelling coolly on their aim so that every shot should tell, the pikemen beating back the cavalry on the quays where Forrestal was pointing his miniature artillery, the troops not deriving all the advantage possible from their superior arms owing to the narrow-

ness of their front, a contingency which Lord Edward Fitzgerald had reckoned on in the enthusiastic days when he dreamt of fighting in Dublin streets, and ere long a hand-to-hand combat was being waged from north to south, from east to west, within as well as without the walls. In vain Johnson, now on his second horse, fought desperately, cheering on the wearied men, crying that he would lay his bones in Ross that day, and asking would they let him lie there alone! In vain Heathcote, by order of General Fowles, flung the cavalry on the serried pikes, each charge resolving itself into furious *mêlées* where the pike struck home across the short frenzied sweep of the parrying sword, and many a trooper found a nameless grave that day without even the casual honour of mention in a despatch, reticence being a distinguishing characteristic of the Administration, a reticence doubly needful in the case of generals who like Sir John Moore, proved themselves far too diffuse in their communications with Government.

If the Dublin Militia fought "like furies," as an enthusiastic chronicler puts it, the insurgents fought "so that the very devils out of hell could not withstand them." No longer waiting for the shock, the pikemen sprang to meet the charger, a prod in the nostrils sending the steed rearing backward, the bridle rein being severed and the rider stabbed ere the pawing forefoot pressed earth again. Down Neville Street now beginning to blaze fiercely, down Michael Street, blazing too, into Friary Street arched like half Cross Lane by curving masses of vapour, the furious fight raved on.

The main guard was hidden by white smoke, wreaths through which the flame of the guns showed every half-minute, the streets shuddering to their hoarse reverberation, every window frame clattering dismally as its broken glass tinkled down on the cobble stones, but in the lanes and once more in the bordering houses the fight with the

steel was hottest, the soldiers, Dragoons and Midlothians, Dublins and Cavans, Meaths and Clares and Antrims—English, Scotch, Irish-Scotch, breed and half-blood and mongrel, firing as fast as they could load upon the rushing throng, the pikemen stabbing them through the embrasures, or smashing asunder the frail barriers they had time to erect, and hurling them down upon the bloody pavement where they themselves were perchance to die a few seconds later. Back along the southern side of the roaring town reeled the English troops, their retreat covered by the guns at the main guard, the church and the Market Place, soon the bridge was thronged a second time by the broken battalions, and once more the town was held by Irishmen.

"*Bon jour, messieurs, mais n'y revenez pas!*" laughed Devereux, lifting his sword hilt as he leaned a moment against the side of the house which had been converted into an hospital.

"Gad, that was a surprise, and no mistake," cried Kelly, wiping his face on his coat sleeve, "but the men who beat Eugene out of Cremona in their shirts and breeches have not died yet. By the way, a most unfortunate thing occurred just now, forty of the Clares who were for us were piked by mistake just as they were coming to our side, it will set the regiment doubly against us, they are holding Irishtown savagely."

"Aye, that is the reason I heard the people crying out—"Clares, don't fire upon your religion!" said a burly, soldier-like man who came up sheathing a dragoon's sword.

"Well, Mr Roche, we must only try to do the best we can without them," said Devereux, "the English are beaten off at any rate."

"But not for long," replied the priest gravely, "the fight is by no means over, and if they are rallied again we may find it not so easy to dislodge them; as it is, the men are wearied out, they are hardly able to cope

with the guns at the Market Place yonder, then there is Rosbercon which should have been in our hands by this, untaken—and where are the reserves to march for it? Every moment is a breathing time for the enemy, and instead of keeping up the fight, here are some of our fellows actually going home. Listen—Tim, where are you going at all?"

"Home, yer reverence," replied a stalwart pikeman, who with a group of others was passing, and turning on his heel a moment.

"Home!" cried Father Roche.

"Yes, sure I'm afraid the Orangemen, bad cess to 'em, will have the place in ashes."

"But the battle here is not over yet!" cried the priest, pointing to the Market Place where some redcoats could be distinguished.

"Yerrah, is it them little popguns," replied the man, snapping his fingers. "I'm ashamed of yer reverence. Shure a handful of gorsoons could turn 'em out with a few kipeens, glory be to God! It's time for fighting we do be havin', an' grand weather—Well, good-bye, gentlemen; we'll be marchin' for Duncannon Fort to-morrow, you'll see." And despite the urgent entreaties of his commander, he rejoined the group of retreating men already some distance away.

"I shall go to the hill," said Devereux sharply, "and get reinforcements. I cannot understand why none of my men come for instructions. See, the very streets are empty of all save the dead and wounded."

"Reinforcements!" cried Cloney, who came rapidly down from Mill Lane; "that's the very word. I don't blame the poor devils who have been drinking all night and fighting all the morning, but what can Harvey be thinking of? Where are the Kilkenny men?"

Kelly shrugged his shoulders. "God knows," he said. "They might have guessed something was occurring," he continued. "New Ross has not a bonfire like this every

day," and he pointed to the heavy column of sooty smoke rising on the summer air. "Ah, they have the red flag down at last. Good; here's to its fall!" And he drained a goblet of wine pretty Mary Doyle had just drawn from the cask she had caused to be rolled into the street, in order to prevent some pikemen from lingering in an adjoining tavern.

Meanwhile Devereux hastened to the Three Bullet Gate, and was turning into the fence-bordered approach when he almost ran against Harrigan. The latter started back, putting his hand to his sword, while he flashed a sudden, questioning glance at the other who laughed.

"Ah, well met!" cried Devereux. "Go to General Harvey at once, and get him to send what men he can here; we are not able to hold the place as it is, if we have not supports, and if a second attack be delivered, they may drive us out as they have nearly done just now."

Harrigan stared at him a moment, then smiling, saluted, and apparently hurried off on his errand, while Devereux, glad at having saved the time, hastened back to get pick-axes and a party of men for the purpose of breaking through the houses near Michael's Lane, and thus commanding the fire of Hamilton's guns. The search was a tedious one, and in it he met convincing proofs that the insurgents were chiefly animated by the hope of drink and plunder, having little idea of the magnitude of what they had achieved, or the arduous nature of the task yet lying before them. Neither did the contingent from Corbet Hill arrive, and at the suggestion of Cloney, who was marching again with an attenuated force to attack Irishtown, he rode to the hill, leaving his detail hacking through an attic wall.

He had not gone far when he met one of his horse, who gave him a disquieting account of the camp. "God knows what they are thinking about," he said; "nobody in the same mind two minutes—nothing but messages—I'm afraid things are going three-na-caila."

When he arrived he found Harvey striding up and down before his tent, addressing disjointed sentences to his staff who were standing idly by, or bidding his secretary, Mr Grey, write despatches which were almost immediately cancelled.

Putting the best face possible upon his mission, Devereux came forward and stated the success already achieved and the necessity of sending reinforcements.

"Take those yonder, every man of 'em," cried Mr Harvey, pointing to groups, or rather disorderly crowds, of men seated on fences here and there sulkily watching the battle smoke that hung above the elms of Rosemount and Summerhill. "But will they go with you?"

Devereux went to the men, who listened to the considerations which he breathlessly urged, and after a while they began to argue.

"We are ready to go," said a young peasant, "but who is to lead us? There's General Harvey walking up and down; why does he not come over and show us what to do?"

Devereux rushed back to Harvey.

"What do you want me to do?" cried the other in answer to his appeal. "Show them what to do! They won't follow me or anyone else. They have been drinking all the night and fighting all the morning, and it's past two o'clock now, and if they haven't driven out the English 'tis their own fault, and let them pay for it—As they will, by G—d!"

"They want a man in front," continued Devereux, disregarding the petulant speech. "They would follow if only they were properly led. General Johnson I have seen myself an hour ago, on foot, among the private men, sword in hand, bidding them come on and conquer. 'The bullet is not cast that will kill General Johnson!' he cried, and the sorry rascals almost believed him. We have beaten him for the second time, but while he lives he is a danger. They want a General Johnson here."

"Why do they not obey my orders, instead of expecting me to lead them to a hurling match?" shouted Harvey. "Are they or you, sir, in command? Every order I give is disobeyed. I sent you an order half an hour ago to force your way by hook or crook down Chapel Lane with one of the swivels I sent on, and a hundred pikemen who were to be followed by five hundred, and were to command the bridge —— Have you obeyed that order?"

"By whom was it sent?" asked Devereux.

"By a gentleman who has been acting as messenger, an officer who came here with reinforcements."

"Do you know his name?" demanded Devereux.

"No," replied Harvey. "It is his order is of consequence."

"Give me a corporal's guard and I shall carry it out," cried Devereux. "Where is the gun?"

"It was sent on," answered the unhappy general, "about ten minutes ago with eight rounds of ammunition.

Devereux struck his forehead.

"Yes, Captain Devereux," said Mr Gray, referring to some slips of paper, "we also sent on another gun, a ship one."

"I never received either, or the order!" replied Devereux.

Harvey shrugged his shoulders.

"Where's Captain Devereux?" shouted stentorian tones. And a pikeman, no other than Mat, came bounding up the hillside.

"Here!" cried Devereux. "What is it?"

"Treachery! Kitty Creagh is a prisoner at Scullabogue. I saw her there under guard with the rest; she says that Steve Harrigan, who was exercising in the bawn field over at Malplaquet with us, is a traitor and a spy. She told one of the Saxons a week ago, but she doesn't know where he is; she saw Harrigan in Wexford, but he ran out of the town. He is serving on our side, morryah,

but when she met him yesterday over at Vinegar Hill, she told on him to Father Murphy, but the Devil, who will have his soul, gave him such strength that he downfaced her, an' only for the priest they'd pike her, an' she was sent to Carrickbyrne to have it proved. I came on from Taghmon to-day, an' it was luck I passed that way. She is guarded by hardy boys that are friends of his unbeknownst, an' she's afraid of her life, for the others are drinkin', an' their captain is a stiff-necked bodacht. Harrigan is gone to Corbet Hill with some of 'em, to take the lynch-pin out of the cart as she heard him say."

In an instant Devereux understood the single startled look the spy had flashed at him by the Gate.

"Mr Harvey," he said, "I can answer for the honesty of the sender of this message. For God's sake see that no harm befalls her; she has been one of our staunchest friends. Was the man who carried the message like this?" he added, describing Harrigan's appearance.

"Yes, yes," cried Harvey impatiently, "what's to be done now?"

Devereux put his hand to his forehead. "My fault, my fault!" he said hoarsely. "If that wretch should get as far as the English lines and let Johnson know our situation all is lost again. Bah, it is to be, I suppose, but at least over this we have power — to die if we cannot conquer!"

He ran back to the disorderly files of apathetic men sunning themselves on the hillside. "Are you mad?" he shouted, "that you sit there idly when all, all is at stake? If we win this town we shall have Waterford to-morrow, and French ships in a fortnight with plenty of rifles and real cannon, and we shall be free! If you lose this chance you shall never set foot in yonder town again, save as slaves. Do you hear?"

Aye, they heard well enough, as they told him, but they remained ratiocinative. How did they know where they were going? Most of the people who went down

there did not come back again—divil's cure to 'em. Shure anyway the town was taken—to-morrow, when they would be fresh, would be time enough.

Devereux stood motionless before the weary apathetic faces, the faces of men tired out by a night of carousing, ill-tempered to the verge of insubordination, and, as he could see, for the moment absolutely indifferent. Then a terrible thought came to him, a thought which must sometimes beset even the most sanguine of those who strive for Irish independence: Are those people worth fighting for?

"Bah," he cried bitterly, sheathing his sword, "let me call up a priest from yonder town where they are fighting your battle, and get you to your prayers. Perhaps the God of Moses will hear the petition of cowards!"

Then, he remembered the centuries of wrong and persecution those weary faces had come through, the evil procession of laws designed with hellish ingenuity to degrade them to the level of the beasts they followed across the furrows or sold in the Market Place, the foulest code of the foulest tyranny that ever struck at a nation through its religion. He remembered too that the very faith at which he sneered had been the sole link which bound them to aught of good report, the only star of hope in their gloomy skies, the single sustaining power which had saved them from the national obliteration which was and is the policy of England.

"I apologise," he said, lifting his hat.

The apology, like the taunt, passed almost without notice. The tired peasants could only see that the gentleman was angry about something—well, let him get over it.

"There," said Harvey at his shoulder, "you see how it is."

"General Harvey," replied Devereux, "I have seen the best troops in the world in action, and I have never seen braver than those very men; the courage which con-

quered our little derangement at the Gate is sufficient to take New Ross a dozen times over from the English rascallions yonder."

"True for ye!" swore a powerful man, "an' we'll do it to—to-morrow, when we're fresh an' hearty!"

"That to-morrow will never come for you," replied Devereux. "Oh God, are you men with reasoning brains, or——"

Suddenly there was a cry from some women calling shrilly, and a little lithe figure came rushing through the files, a banner hastily caught up in its grasp. It was young Lett, who had been detained as a hostage.

"Come," he cried, running forward still, "follow me who dare!"

And down the hill he sped, the banner fluttering, a spot of tinselled blue beneath the blue of heaven.

Bold heart, fit to be in the memory of posterity with that other child who put his foot through the King's drum at Gorey rather than wake its gallant music for "rebels"; fit to be brother to that yeoman officer, little more than a child, who, by an example too rarely shown, curbed the Orange brutes he led when they would have dishonoured the defenceless wives of their enemies.

There was a moment's silence. Devereux drew his sword. "Men!" he cried, "will you allow the children of your foemen shame you?"

With a cheer they sprang to their feet; with another formed confusedly, and with a third dashed down the hillside, that little bounding figure and flickering flag fluttering before!

They were soon at the Three Bullet Gate, actually catching a glimpse of an officer galloping back through the flaming length of the streets approaching it, but did not know that it was General Johnson, who having been warned by Harrigan, had ridden thither to bid the handful still pent up there take courage, that help was coming.

On dashed the reinforcement past Mill Lane, one sheet of flame, past Michael Street, lighting too, on through Neville Street, in a desperate charge for the Market Place where the gun was thundering, but between them and the post were two swivels served by skilful hands, and the first rank was blown away only to be succeeded by the second, and that by the third, but still they pressed on, and storming past the guns or speeding down Chapel Lane gained the Market Place itself where the fiercest fighting of the fierce day was waged, while men led by Cloney thundered at the Market Gate, and Borheen na Slawn was flooded by blood that smoked in the hot June sunlight.

Up the hill from the bridge toiled the reformed ranks of the English, yeomen and regulars, as they had been dragged into line by their officers, who were strenuously aided by one M'Cormick, formerly a quartermaster of dragoons, and whose wife remained to serve the soldiery with drink through all the turmoil of the strife, but foremost of them all came the veteran Johnson himself.

Most of the insurgent cannon was by this time quite useless, though Forrestal won his way with that he commanded along South Street as far as Major Cliffe's house, the soldier tied to the carriage elevating the muzzle of the piece, and loading with scattering grape whenever possible.

"Aha," he yelled as a quoin came uselessly tumbling down, and a few men fell at his side, swept away by a chain-shot from Hamilton's gun, "there's a fine aim for you!"

"Aye," replied Forrestal, with one of those sudden flashes of inspiration which, if acted upon at other junctures of the rebellion, might have changed its history, "but this is a better one!" And drawing a pistol, he shot the man dead.

CHAPTER XXV

THE battle had been furious before, now it was no longer a battle but a fight of fiends, in which no order could be preserved, no command obeyed. The soldiery led back to the close-knit strife once more found themselves caught in a whirlpool of flame and steel, for everywhere, incredible as it may seem, the insurgents had rallied, and though wofully spent, flung themselves into the hideous struggle with undiminished ardour. Chapel Lane was taken, the guard at the Market Place driven in over the bodies of hundreds who had perished beneath the hurricanes of grape and canister, but the main guard still held its ground, Hamilton refusing to retire, while the brothers Dowsley and some others posted opposite Bakehouse Lane beat off the pikemen clustering there at intervals with the intention of storming the post, the work of breaking through the walls being carried on in a desultory fashion, and soon abandoned. Yet down the grape-swept curve of Mary Street the reckless legions charged, displaying a courage desperate as the humour which made poor Bridget Lonergan's old father dash up to one of the guns swinging into position, thrust his hat and wig into its scorching muzzle, and shout, "Come on, boys, her mouth's stopped!" alas, to be blown to pieces the next moment.

To and fro swayed the combat throughout the slanting streets of the little burning town, every door shattered, every other house a scene of hand-to-hand fights waged until the blazing roof fell in, and the combatants reeled out over the blood-drenched gutters to kill. Even the sense of direction was lost, the men blindly returning

upon their own traces, stupefied by the smoke that surged low on the weltering air, ere they dropped down in the throes of suffocation and perished miserably, untouched by ball or bayonet, under the hoofs of the cavalry, who, led gallantly by Heathcote, won lost ground on the quays or in the more level streets.

Knots of soldiers cut off from their comrades, posted themselves in shops or in private houses, whence they swept the ways with a withering fire until piked or driven forth by the flames, so that from the Three Bullet Gate to the Market Place the same street might be held by different detachments of the adverse parties in absolute ignorance of each other's proximity, not knowing or caring aught any longer save to madly ram home each charge, lest death should still hand and eye ere the trigger could be pulled again.

Irene had looked at brief intervals upon such phases of the fight as passed across her narrow field of observation, most of the time being spent in a back room by the bedside of Miss Prue who, tossing in fever, moaned for news; but now the frenzy of the battle which circled the house, and the roaring of the cannon whose concussion had shattered every pane of glass in the building, made her crouch there clasped in the old woman's arms.

After a while the smell of burning rafters permeated the room, then the raucous yell of street combat grew up around them, the hall door was suddenly dashed in, and instantly the whole house resounded to horrid English blasphemies and frightful Irish imprecations as a small body of dismounted troopers and yeomen, who had been cut off from the detachment meant to relieve Three Bullet Gate, took refuge there. All through the basement floors and up the groaning stairs the fight wavered and stamped, sabre and musket butt against sword and shortened pike, while outside volleys shrieked and canister hissed along the riven house fronts like a venomous thing balked of its human prey.

Presently the door of the front room crashed inward amid oaths and pistol shots, the clatter of struggling feet and the angry rasp of steel, the soldiers fighting madly as she could guess from the guttural cries and exclamations of the peasants, then fresh footsteps thundered on the stairs and there was the crash of splintered wood-work and the thud of falling bodies in the street below, which meant that some of the combatants had been hurled bodily out through the window; a whiff of burning thatch set Miss Prue coughing, and when the paroxysm passed, save for the groaning on the stair, all was silent.

Trembling, the girl listened a while, and urged by the older lady, slipped out upon the landing. A dead man lay there in a slobber of blood, half his face blown away, and at the stair-head a splotch of scarlet where a soldier with protruding entrails was writhing.

Shading her eyes, she stole into the front room. Another peasant lay on his back just past the threshold, his swarthy dead face set in the fierce frown of fight, the whites of the eyes alone visible. Beneath an overturned table the gaiters of a yeoman protruded, and, pinned in a corner, another soldier whose head had been cleft by one stroke of the broken pike yet grasped in the patriot's right hand, a firelock with shattered butt, bending from the wainscot where it hung by the twisted bayonet, mute evidence of the fury of the stab which failed. The window embrasures were naked of sashes, both having been torn asunder as completely as if a round shot had passed that way, but through it wisps of smoke from a blazing house opposite were pouring now intermittently in the veering of the summer breeze.

Holding up her skirts, she prepared to cross the room, slippery with blood, hoping some succour or assistance from the street, for the fight on the stair appalled her spirit, but she had not taken two steps when an arm was flung round her, a hot mouth fell on her neck, and she found herself in the grasp of a dragoon who had been hiding on the upper flights.

"You damned Popish w——," he said, seizing her about the waist as she struggled to reach the window with the intention of leaping out, "how damned hot ye are that ye come here to be cooled! You don't care for the rascally rebels, eh? It's the King's men you're after? Come let me see if you've any scafflers on ye!" And he thrust his hand into her heaving bosom, the enlightened soldier having a proper contempt for such superstitious mummery. She struck him madly in the face; he caught her by the throat.

He had been under arms all night, and fighting all day in the heat of the burning sun above and the rage of the blazing roofs below. Save the drinks he had had from Mrs M'Cormick, nothing had passed his lips since the evening before. The hell of blood and strife had taken from him whatever humanity, whatever faint sense of soldier chivalry weeks of free quarters had left, and the sight of a defenceless woman was like the gates of Paradise.

Poor thing, she clutched at his swollen arm, just as a bird might peck the hand which robs its nest; he laughed brokenly, and held her there, panting a little with fatigue, but sure of his prey.

She lifted her blanched face to his, seeking for some trace of God's handiwork upon it, and closed her eyes in horror of what she saw there. He grinned and strained her closer.

"My bonny wench, how cursed modest ye are!" He said, putting his head on one side, "you little chalk cheeks —Wait, I'll put a little of this croppy's blood on 'em to rouge 'em—sink me!"

"For God's sake, kill me!" she gasped.

"Oho, don't fear, I'll do that—after," he retorted. "God, what a throat to cut the wench has!" he muttered, racial instincts asserting themselves. "Come, come!"

Then a desperate struggle began; pride, horror, the high courage of her blood, the modesty of maidenhood, all gave her strength. Her resistance roused the gloating

demon within him, and he strove to free his arm from which the fragment of his broken sabre dangled, reeling hither and thither as she clung to him, the saliva roping his heavy jowls, the tongue protruding from between his lips.

Outside, there were dropping shots in the street, then a whirl of charging hoofs, the fight had surged round to that quarter again. But above the crackle of musketry there was another, nearer sound, the hiss of travelling flames: a puff of blue smoke, another and yet another rose into the still air from beneath the window, and wavered into the room through the shattered casement. Then a miniature cloud burst upward and surged in, its white opaque volume growing denser each minute, the room becoming stiflingly hot and the boards beneath their feet far warmer than the newly spilt blood could make them. Just at the very door below a yell of victory and of execration drowned the clattering of hoofs and the intermittent clash of steel, the shout grew, there was stamping in the room beneath. Irene heard it, and screamed. The brute struggling with her looked over his shoulder and freed his arm by a furious wrench, the demon of murder urging him now, but he slipped on the reeking floor and they fell; he put his knee upon her bosom.

All strength seemed to leave the quivering girl, and in her agony she shrieked aloud—for the mother she had seen laid to rest—for her father—for God who seemed so far away—for Heathcote? No: for Devereux. "Frank, Frank," she screamed, "save me, save me!"

She did not hear Miss Prue in the hall calling—"Help, gentlemen, for the honour of God!" possibly forgetting for the nonce the want of gallantry on the part of the despised "croppies."

A shout high above the din of battle, a shout that would have bridged a tempest, answered. A man in powder-blackened blue, gloriously scarlet on breast and shoulder, now sprang up the steps and flashed into the room, his streaming blade uplifted.

There was a hot, wet thing on her face, the life blood of the man with whom she struggled. A shriek of joy burst from her; she held out her arms to Devereux who caught her in them, lifting his right hand to shield her eyes from the sight of the trooper writhing up against the pikes two or three insurgents buried in his body again and again, as she had seen a mad dog which had strayed into the yard one burning July day, killed by Mat.

"Is the street clear?" asked Devereux, wiping the lady's face with her hair, as she lay fainting in his arms.

"I think so," replied Mat himself, "an' if all the soldiers from here to Dublin were there, the place is too hot to stay in. Wirra, did anyone ever see the likes of it?"

"Is there any place in Mary Street where we can bestow those ladies," continued Devereux, the mighty tumult of the fray centring now around the lovely face lying against his shoulder.

Mat shook his head. "Mary Street is not on fire," he said, "but the fighting is very bad there now, the swivel gun is making lanes through 'em."

"Good God!" cried the officer, commencing to descend the stairs whence the dead bodies had been removed, "and they might have had control of that gun an hour ago, if they had an ounce of sense, and worked their way through the houses opposite the marksmen!"

"Yerrah, 'tisn't an ounce but a dram of sense they haven't," answered Mat, "an' be the same token 'tis too many drams of something else they are after havin' I'm thinkin'. There's the hospital at the corner though," he continued, "an' if we were to put 'em in a house near, the guard could have an eye to 'em, until we could look out for a proper place."

"For God's sake, General Devereux," cried Miss Prudence, who with her trembling feet in slippers and a quilt pulled over her dressing-gown showed her face aflame with fever at the door, "hasten away from this

dreadful house—bestow us anywhere for the present—Hark!"

There was a thunderous crash overhead, the roof had fallen in and the street was dark with its smoke. Feeling their way cautiously, they went forward, looking round for some landmark to guide them, but the awful strife of twelve hours' duration had battered every familiar feature almost past recognition. The shop fronts were mere fissures above the piled debris of the splintered boards which once had shuttered them, the smoke-blackened plaster of the walls peeling off in wide strips, the upper windows mere squares of empty frames outlined against the lurid glow of the conflagration within. Dead bodies were everywhere — leaning from the sills, roasting on the burning floorings, heaped in the entrances and halls, stretched across the thresholds, scattered along the narrow streets, some singly, others swept together in battle drifts as the grape shot struck them down. Going on a little further, the scarlet coats grew more numerous, and farther on still they came upon a mound of red-coats about a silent gun left in the very centre of the street its captors either shot down, or unable to use it.

They went forward still, feeling their way cautiously, for the smoke was blinding, and in that vast sea of conflict and of confusion no man could discern aught surely.

They had proceeded down Neville Street, a blazing avenue now, when a man running blindly, burst upon the party. His face was black with gun-powder and seamed by channels where the perspiration had partially washed it off again; his hair was singed, the very coat on his back smoking, and the sling in which his arm was wrapped, half-burnt.

"Run!" he yelled, "the sojers—Oh God, Mr Devereux is that you? Where are ye going to at all? Don't you know? The sojers are back an' they're burning the

hospital—don't you hear the people screechin'. Look, yerrah, look!"

The man was brave even to fool-hardiness as Devereux knew, having seen him fighting at the Gate, and later on at the barrack where he received his wound, but now he appeared actually unmanned by the recollection of the horror he had escaped, and glanced ever and anon over his shoulder, trembling violently.

"Burnt the hospital!" cried Devereux.

"Yes, they set fire to it, an' 'tis a miracle I got out—every wan of 'em shootin' at me," he replied.

They advanced, the evening breeze lifting the canopy of smoke, and suddenly at a little distance, saw the corner house in flames, flames darting from the upper and lower stories, and flickering beneath the slates, but at the windows were frightful faces, faces of men frenzied beyond conception, some having dragged their broken limbs across the scorching floors as they implored the soldiers in the street to fire and end their misery. Round that doomed house clustered red-coated men jeering at those others burning there before their very eyes, some even lifting their guns and lowering them again in mockery of the prayers.

It was a sight which should have been witnessed by the inactive patriots on Corbet Hill and their humane general; it was a sight which may be profitably remembered by Irishmen all the world over in those days of less flagrant methods.

"There is a gun a little lower down the street," said Devereux quietly; "perhaps there may be some powder left?"

"No cannon for me!" cried the man, "no guns for me any more. But I know what I'll do; my cousin and my uncle are roasting there, my wife's father and brother—don't ye hear 'em? Arrah, you needn't stop your ears, lady, sure they are only croppies—But, by heaven, I'll have a life for a life before I lie down to-night!"

And, with a hideous curse, he disappeared in the direction of the Three Bullet Gate.

Turning, they went back to the gun, a small indifferently mounted carronade, and Devereux, resigning Miss Neville to her shivering companion, who was crouching in a hall, searched, with a calmness which surprised himself, amongst the dead bodies encumbering its trail, and presently discovered some made-up cartridges.

Instructing two of his party to brace the wheels, Devereux loaded methodically, primed, and then having ignited the slow match at a wisp of burning thatch, fired at chance down the smoke-curtained street. The jeering suddenly ceased, though not the yells of agony, and the trampling of feet showed that the soldiers had taken flight. At the same moment a horseman, whom he recognised as belonging to his troop, came galloping up recklessly through the confusion.

"General Harvey's orders," he cried, breathlessly; "retreat as quick as possible; fresh reinforcements are coming from Glenmore for the English!"

"Don't go another step!" shouted Devereux impulsively. "We have half won the town already. Glenmore's over two miles away, and we shall have the rest before they can come up. Go back, for God's sake, and tell him that!"

"Faith, 'tis nothing but orders and counter orders," replied the man, wheeling round, "though I'm only too glad to take that message; but I'm afraid it won't be much use, there were others sent round by the Priory Gate to bring 'em back."

"No matter," cried Devereux; "steady there, don't prod the charge, but ram it tight evenly. Tell him that they are going back again. See!" And he pointed through the thinning smoke at a score of yeomen who had hastily evacuated some shops, and were retiring up the street, firing over their shoulders aimlessly.

"Begob, so they are!" assented the Shielmalier.

"Glory be to God"—But at that moment the cannon roared, and his terrified horse, rearing madly, dashed off along the route he had come.

"Let him send what men he can," shouted Devereux, "instead of waiting for the evening attack. One good push now and the place is ours. Bear a hand with the gun, men!"

Then seizing the trail, he, with the aid of the party, rolled the cannon up the uneven street, its heavy muzzle wagging from side to side as it jolted over the bodies of the red-coats lying before the hospital, where only the flames were shrieking now, the little hand-drawn cart containing the ammunition being dragged behind.

But, if Devereux's eye had noted the signs of breaking in the English force, another, as keen, was watching on the long quay where Heathcote marshalled his cavalry—dragoons and yeomen, as they huddled away in confusion towards the bridge out of range of Forrestal's gun.

A large body of pikemen was advancing up the street, unawed by Hamilton's swivels, that brave man being hard pressed on both sides now. Suddenly the column paused as several men rode up the files shouting something he could not hear, but intuitively the soldier felt the news could not be good, and, guessing that a crucial moment had come, ordered a charge, himself several lengths ahead, the squadrons thundering behind, a stream of scarlet and glancing steel.

The insurgents did not rush forward with their old *elan*, but, halting, met the shock firmly, though galled by Hamilton's gun, and, recovering their formation wonderfully, beat off the cavalry again. But their advance was stopped, as Heathcote, looking over his shoulder, saw, and by desperate exertions he rallied his men at Bridge Street, already dotted by groups of cursing men scattering away towards Rosbercon.

Again he led his troopers forward through the drifting

smoke wrack, fearing all the while he was simply covering the retreat, as he had twice that day; but, as the tide recedes, the pikemen had fallen back in the interval, a fringe of dead marking the spot where they had met the last charge.

Again they doggedly closed up, halted, and dressed their riven front; but the dragoons, inspirited by their partial success, pushed home, and through the reeling column the good swords won their way, the peasants being hurled back several struggling yards towards Friary Street, but fighting desperately still.

The evening breeze was blowing steadily over the sighing woods by the Barrow, and it brought the sound of trumpets calling from Corbet Hill; but for Devereux, pointing his piece in the blazing thoroughfares, it served merely to lift the pall of smoke surging between him and the retreating mob of English soldiery falling back under cover of the gun at Church Lane, whose gunners he scourged from them with rending showers of grape, though his own command suffered heavily, some too having slunk away on hearing the talk of retreat. Yet, those who remained were armed with rifles, and displaying a coolness equal to the much-vaunted British steadiness under fire, loaded and aimed as calmly as if shooting rabbits on the slopes of Carrigrew, forcing the yeomen farther and farther towards the Market Place, where Johnson was undisguisedly making his last stand.

"Oh for two hundred pikemen now!" moaned Devereux, glancing at the cart where only fifteen rounds remained. "The place is ours, what are they thinking of?"

At that moment a man whose weary, red-lidded eyes were half shut rounded the corner of a lane, some twenty men at his heels. It was Cloney, and he greeted his comrade with a hoarse cheer. Those of his command who had guns, perhaps half a dozen, fell into line while the pikemen retired a little, halting and leaning on their pike staffs with all the signs of complete physical exhaustion.

Cloney pulled off his hat and rubbed the perspiration from the interior. "Did you hear of Kelly?" he said, "he's wounded."

"Yes, slightly, though it may be tedious," replied Devereux, who had not but thought it bad policy to discuss casualties just then, "we shall have a surgeon when we get to the Market Place—our marksmen aim well, nearly every shot takes place."

"Oh, he is on the way to Wexford by this," continued Cloney, "he could not walk, a bullet in the leg—just when we wanted an officer like him, the men are endurant of fatigue, but this drinking has ruined them, 'Sdeath, I wish we had that same little gun there, at Irishtown, the English beat us off. Where are you going?"

"Yonder," replied Devereux, whose campaigning experience and outlaw life stood him in good stead, and he pointed at a swivel which had reopened fire but with indifferent success.

"Well now is the time to charge before they find the range," said Cloney, "Push the cannon on one side, and I'll bring up the supports—Advance, pikemen!"

"There are no supports," replied Mat grimly, steadying the recoil as the gun swung back, having hurled its shrieking tempest of grape upon the gunners busy at the adverse gun's mouth, and a mounted officer who had just ridden up, sank with his steed in a heap behind.

"Bravo!" cried Cloney, laughing, "maybe it's Johnson himself."

At the words the officer staggered to his feet, sword in hand, rushed to the gun, beating the brass with the flat, and waving his hat while the gunners sprang forward, loading with feverish rapidity, and the next moment a round shot struck the carronade hurling it over on one side, and killing the man who was ramming home the charge.

Two men who were firing steadily at some soldiers

posted in a bow window, now a mere skeleton, rose and retired.

"Why are you falling back?" shouted Devereux as he righted the gun.

"We have no more shots," answered one.

"Break up a couple of those cartridges," said the soldier, indicating the handful of charges left in the cart, "we'll have yonder barker silenced in a minute or two."

"It would be better to retire the gun," said Cloney significantly, "they are getting dispirited. Steady!"

A hissing chain-shot whistled over Devereux's forehead as he looked along the shining length of the piece, and tore the head from a pikeman's shoulders. The firing line drew back as if by one accord.

Coolly giving fire, Devereux sent back a storm of canister, caught a group of soldiers clustering incautiously at the shop window, and scattered their mangled bodies across the sill. Then, grasping the trail, he with the assistance of Cloney and the others dragged the gun up Neville Street.

Back through the dreary, debris-fringed ways they went, pulling the cannon laboriously until they reached the hospital whose roof had by this fallen in on the crackling floors. Here they were enveloped by an eddy of flight, the wreckage of the broken ranks that had fought so heroically on the quays, some laughing, some muttering, some silent with the compressed lip of bootless rage; hastening one after the other in a blind, helter-skelter race they knew not whither. A few patted the cannon as they passed with careless familiarity, and joked amongst themselves, hailing Cloney's pikemen gaily.

There was no sign of panic, hardly of dejection, they were simply going away because the general ordered a retreat, and the powder was spent, for one thing, and the English—bad cess to 'em, had more of that as well as cannon-balls "that fired twice," but they were coming back again—plaze God, in the evening.

They bore many wounded men on stretchers, having evidently a vague idea of setting them down at the hospital where they now clustered to gaze upon the lurid sight. Springing on a pile of household *débris*, Devereux, blood-stained and powder-blackened from head to foot, fit herald of the story, told of the murder wrought within, and a chorus of execration rose above the bones of their kindred dropping to ashes within that burning pit. But, the weak tones of the once vigorous voices which had so often sent up the shout of victory, made the officers glance at one another significantly, and Cloney stamping hither and thither to keep himself awake, roughly bade them limber up and retire with the wounded.

They obeyed mechanically, but a stillness fell upon those reckless ranks where the grisly frown of Death has never checked the laugh or jest—and, please God, never shall—while they marched past that blazing infamy.

Suddenly a volley screamed through the drifting smoke wreaths, and many fell writhing, never to rise again: another followed, and then a column front, marching steadily, each rank firing and disappearing by the flanks to make way for the next, showed its scarlet front close by. It was the first regularly conducted advance since the morning, and was led by the gentleman who had rallied the gunners a few minutes before, his brave old face transfigured by the glory of the fight as he cheered on his rascallions with the same dauntless courage which had again and yet again turned the veering fortune of the day.

On came the column, the declining sunlight painting the wavy shadows of smoke and flame across the way. Devereux sprang to the gun, a few determined men who had fought on and off through the day flanking the piece and loading their hot rifles with the powder from the broken cartridges carried loose in their pockets, while Cloney checked a too precipitate flight by energetic commands which the wearied men now obeyed. At the same

moment Johnson shouted "Charge!" but as the word left his mouth Devereux fired, and the point blank storm of grape bit a gap in the front rank, the riflemen also picking down a man here and there. Again he fired, but the English troops recovering delivered a volley, which tore away the men from the wheels and blew the hat from his own head.

"Volunteers!" he yelled, snatching the rammer from a falling gunner's hand, and preparing another charge. For an instant no one replied, and then a face showed through the smoke at his shoulder; it was Irene's, and at a gesture her soft hands closed on the blood-impasted spokes, even as Devereux fired. Though the recoil jarred her frame, she held on bravely, and saw the scarlet mass broken into a writhing knot of disordered men, some reeling in agony up the street, others beating their way backward through the supporting ranks.

Up Mary Street whirled another driven storm of fugitives, dragging a gun, or crowding about the shafts of a car filled with wounded, to help the horse straining against the hill, Father Roach and a little party steadily covering the retreat. The English were now reforming, and their volleys told in the thronged street. The men drawing the gun dropped the ropes, but through their staggering masses a woman pushed her way, dauntless Mary Doyle, and with a sudden bound seated herself upon the piece, a mark for every bullet whistling there.

"Shame!" she cried. "I for one will never abandon this dear little gun which has cost so many brave men's lives, and if ye will not carry it away, then here I stay!"

It was a scene worthy of a brighter time and of a happier cause. To their credit the woman's tender, taunting voice arrested the flight of the worn men, who laughing, but sadly, grasped the ropes again and tugged the lumbering cannon onward.

Again and again Devereux loaded and fired, Irene

applying the match, two brave peasants from Father Roche's band at the wheels, but the English volleys flew low, and ere long the gallant fellows lay weltering in their gore across the trail. Irene started back, uttering a cry of dismay, her sweet brow grazed by a bullet, but with a shout Devereux leaped to the gun's recoil, as he rammed home a new charge, and snatching up the match she applied herself once more to her awful task, her ears tingling, her lovely eyes half blinded by the pungent powder. So this gentle lady and her desperate lover served that single gun, the sole defence of the retreating insurgents bearing their wounded round by Michael Street on to the Three Bullet Gate, and so well was the carronade pointed that step by step the attacking column fell back out of range, for they dared not charge, fearing the pikes, and then—then the ammunition cart was empty!

Darting a hurried glance over his shoulder, Devereux saw the street growing clear, and snatching the ramrod from his pistol, he frantically spiked with it the gun, using a broken musket butt for hammer. Then catching the girl's hand, he hurried her on in the wake of the fugitives, the white dense bank of smoke concealing their flight a few minutes longer from the soldiery.

Though the town crackled and blazed, though the hated foe was pressing near, though all that had been done was done in vain, yet those hot moments when hand in hand they sped along those carcase-cumbered streets were the happiest in the young man's life. But as they approached Cross Lane the girl stopped suddenly, for Miss Prue was at the corner beckoning them, a pitifully grotesque, unutterably pathetic figure.

"I must not leave her," sobbed Irene; "she is ill. She has been oh so good to us in many ways—she is old —and—and she has lost much."

"God forbid," replied Devereux, wringing her hands, "though God knows you and she would be safer yonder. Irene, I love you better than life, better than glory, better

than aught else in this poor world—May God never forget what you have done this day for Ireland!"

She flung her arms about his neck; he caught her to him—there in that carnage-choked street, oblivious of all that had been, reckless of all that should be, until a bugle blast mingled with hoarse cheering roused them.

"Good-bye, my heart, light of my life, good-bye," whispered Devereux. "We shall come back ere long! To-night!"

He held her at arm's length, looking into her beautiful face with battle-bright eyes, and then round on the ruin of tottering walls on every side, a picture which never left his memory.

Quite close was a dragoon officer kneeling by a horse lifting its noble head feebly, as it gasped in the last death spasms. He was Heathcote; he raised his eyes and saw Irene. Devereux freed her hands, and turning on his heel strode deliberately through the great Gate, bullets whistling round his head—one of the last men who left New Ross, so nobly won, so madly lost to Ireland.

"It was a famous victory," and loyalist accounts tell gleefully of the dead rebels flung over the bridge next day from Tottenham's carts; the trophies, too, are duly enumerated—the fifteen and a half inch howitzer "on a ship carriage," the iron one, two, three, and four-pounders, the fourteen swivels, "variously mounted," most of them guiltless of blood or powder, and even that formidable piece of ordnance, the brass six-pounder, "tied on a dray"—nothing is forgotten, down to the fourteen shot—of different sizes. Dear God! it was a glorious victory.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN Devereux reached Corbet Hill General Harvey, amid a small group of officers, was steadily gazing through a telescope at a point in the direction of Glenmore, where the glint of bayonets could be descried.

"Can you distinguish the uniform?" asked the general.

"No," replied Mr Gray, levelling his own glass, "but it would seem that they are marching towards New Ross."

Devereux opened the little brass-bound campaigning telescope which had been his companion on many a lonely mountain side. "I hardly think they are going there," he said slowly, after a pause. "There is an officer on horseback watching the smoke above the town, he is talking to some others on foot now—he shakes his head—one can see the plume waving. A man is running back to the main body. So that is an order."

"Possibly to advance," said Harvey; "luckily we drew off. Do you know the uniform?"

"Yes, I think they are the Roscommon regiment," replied Devereux.

"They are going through some manœuvres?" said the general.

"Yes; countermarching," answered the soldier dryly, "and doing it badly too; there is one company clubbed most shamefully. Ah, there they go!"

"To—to New Ross?" said Harvey weakly, after an awful interval.

"No, apparently not," replied Devereux between his teeth. "Ah, the officer is wheeling round too. They

are going fast; see how quickly the column of dust rises above those hedges, and now beyond the coppice. But the road they follow is that to Waterford. Well I know it."

None of the officers spoke for a while; the great cloud of smoke from the burning town slowly drifted across the setting sun, and hung there like a banner flung out upon the evening breeze. Harvey lowered his glass, his face wore a borrowed dignity, the dignity of despair. Devereux watched a little longer and then restored his telescope to its battered case. The others looked on grimly or heedlessly, according to their different dispositions. Presently some turned impatiently away to the rude tripods and their simmering pots where a much needed meal was being prepared, but although no word on the subject was spoken, a sense that a huge mistake had been committed was in the air, as the recalled men lingered together in silent groups, watching the officers silent too.

"General Harvey, for the honour of God—help!" cried a distant voice. And a man came panting up the hillside. "They are murdering the prisoners, burning 'em alive at Scullabogue acrass!"

"Where is John Murphy?" shouted Harvey.

"He can't stop 'em, or the guard either," roared the other; "there's a power of people round the place—— For God's sake send some min there now!"

Harvey nodded, gave a sharp decided order, and running to his horse sprang into the saddle, his example being imitated readily by the wearied officers; some pikemen formed up swiftly into column behind the commanders, who galloped at once forward in the direction of Carrickbyrne.

When Harrigan received the message from Devereux he had instantly borne it to Johnson, and had actually returned with the troops across the bridge when he remembered Heathcote's presence in New Ross. Guess-

ing that it would be safer not to meet the soldier in the fierce mood of battle, he endeavoured to find Gash, but vainly, that gentleman being at the Main Guard, so he determined to leave the place as soon as possible, having a very great doubt also as to the immediate success of the British arms. Accordingly, he slipped into a deserted house, from which he appropriated some portable valuables, and then extending his investigations to other parts of the town on his way, soon accumulated quite a large amount of personal property, which he was obliged to tie laboriously up in a table-cloth. But, as he was hurrying across the intersection of two streets raked by rifle fire, he ran against an officer who had dismounted to snatch a drink at a pump close by; it was Heathcote.

"You ruffian!" he shouted, clutching him by the throat, "where is my pocket-book?"

Harrigan dropped his bundle and struck at him with the butt end of his pistol, but the other held him fast, and a fierce struggle ensued, Harrigan unable to shake off his opponent, and unable to fire.

"Where are my papers, you wretch?" reiterated Heathcote, forcing him against the wall.

"Ask Phil Gash who set me on to steal 'em," answered the robber.

Heathcote started, Harrigan wrenched himself free.

"Ho, guard! A deserter?" shouted the officer, "stop him!"

But the guard had other things to think of, being engaged in a frantic combat with the resistless pikemen whose advance was covered here by a deadly fire, and the spy rushed past the nearest who had heard the order ere it could be obeyed. Heathcote shouted again to a few dragoons just come up, and ran to Lightfoot snorting and plunging at the corner, but Harrigan ere he dashed into the low rolling rifle smoke, turned and fired at the officer as the latter put his foot in the stirrup, the ball slightly wounding the noble horse—a mad rush from the neigh-

bouring street, sweeping dragoon and footman before it the next minute.

Harrigan sped on through the streets, guiding himself by instinct and cursing furiously as he remembered the booty he had been obliged to forego, until finding from the accents of voices behind the smoke which now banked the road, that he was near the insurgent supports, he tore off the scarlet coat he had stripped from a dead yeoman before venturing to the English side, slipped into a house being looted by some not over-zealous pikemen, and getting out by a back door found himself near the Priory Gate.

He naturally turned at once towards Corbet Hill, and even saw the rear of the attacking party under Devereux thunder across his way, when the same ruffian who had borne witness against Kitty Creagh on Vinegar Hill, stopped him.

"Where are you goin' at all, man?" he said hoarsely, "the game's up, Kitty Creagh split to a thief who just now brought the news to the hill, and it is as much as your life is worth to go near it!"

Harrigan paled in spite of himself, the other foot-pad glanced apprehensively over his shoulder. "They sent me to warn ye," he went on, "we are in a bad way, Harrigan, and it's your fault. What'll we do now?"

Harrigan smiled. "So Kitty split on us," he said, "well, what did you expect? That's her last chance; and now here's ours. Leave us go back hot-foot, and tell the guard there that the English are gaining the day, and that there's orders to kill all the prisoners at Scullabogue, for fear they'd be venomous against us after. You can say any priest you think of sent you. Come on, there will be plenty of runaways on the road and they'll be useful for our work!"

They hurried on towards the highway leading to Carrickbyrne, and presently encountered a huge fluctuating crowd, the flotsam and jetsam of the fight, aimlessly "following the road," some on horse-back, some on foot, some half drunk,

others volubly recounting their deeds of prowess, all ripe for any mischief.

"There's no doubt about it, boys," said Harrigan who fell boldly in with the first group, "that the day is lost over there, and by my word, it isn't here this day's business will end, ye'll see. The English were bad enough before, but by G—d they'll be devils in earnest now!"

"True for ye," replied a man who had been a servant to Major Cliffe, and carried one of the gentleman's fowling pieces over his shoulder. "The country won't be big enough to hold us I'm thinkin', and that won't be the worst, but there will be spies and informers going around who'd pick the very thoughts out of your brains!"

"Oh faith, there are plenty of 'em ready made now," replied Harrigan, "and we are keeping a nice box of witnesses too over there lest they'd want swearers."

"Where, eroo?" asked the man.

Harrigan pointed dramatically towards Carrickbyrne. "There's plenty of the women of the North Cork over there," he replied. "Oyeh they'd be ashamed to take a false oath—the jades! Begor, they'll have a field day, swearing away our damned lives."

There was silence, the suggestion was taking root.

"But sure no one harmed a hair of their heads," said a young peasant, "they can't say but the truth; we kept 'em prisoners like the English do be holding our friends—that's all?"

"Yes, but did the English keep 'em wrapped up in cotton wool, like a lease, whenever they lost a battle?" sneered Harrigan. "They'd like that! They cut their throats, if they have the time; sure that's what they were going to do at Enniscorthy, and that's what they did at Dunlavin, and in Kildare—they're not fools, they know the usages of civilized war."

"An' are the prisoners kilt whenever a battle is lost?" cried one of the men, looking at the broken pike head he still carried.

"Of course they are," replied Harrigan, "it's a rule of the game that ancients and moderns always observe—what fools they'd be to leave enemies behind 'em!"

"Begor, there's sense in that," cried a shock-headed, half-witted lad, "an' sure as most of 'em are Proddies, they'd be damned anyway!"

"Of course," answered Harrigan, pleasantly, "it's only sendin' 'em a little before their time to their own place, an' maybe saving 'em from a lower one. After all, the longer they live the more they have to pay. You may take your oath upon it, ye'll regret this when they are swearing your lives away."

"There's a lot of Catholics among 'em," said the first man, answering the thought in the minds of all.

"They are —— queer Catholics!" roared a savage ditcher, armed with a reaping hook, "wasn't I at Oulart Hill watching the boys, an' you'd hear the North Cork screechin', 'Mercy! Shure we're as good Catholics as ye!' when they were running."

"An' the boys gave 'em quarter after that?" observed Harrigan, demurely.

"Mavrone! They didn't, my hand and word, they piked every man of 'em!"

Harrigan nodded his head. "That's the way," he said. "They weren't zanies at any rate."

They went on a little less noisily now, a long dwindling trail of men, some still excited by the drink they had taken, others terrified and ferocious with the ferocity of fear.

"There's one Johnson over in the barn by Scullabogue, I hear," continued Harrigan. "He is a piper—did you ever hear him playing 'Croppies lie down'? No? Well, he's a Catholic, and by my sowkins, some of us will be dancing to that same tune before long—on nothing. But maybe, he'll say a prayer for our souls."

A fierce murmur testified the power of the picture.

"Then, there's Billy Neil, the tailor who used make

clothes for Fawcett's blackguards," pursued Harrigan, "he's a Catholic too—he'll take the measure of any of ye that want 'habits,' begor!"

They went a little more quickly, keeping somewhat closer order, a fierce babble of oaths springing up thickly as Harrigan's words fell steadily with pitiless reiteration.

"And then, there's one Kitty Creagh," he went on, "God! she's a beauty! I was sent over from Vinegar Hill in charge of her this morning, and what do you think she was doing? Supplying one Plornish—maybe ye heard of him—an' his yeos with drink and food too, an' she all the time pretending to be our friend. Sure her husband was an Orangeman, and didn't she get a dacent boy transported when he was shot—she's a Catholic too, God save the mark! Oyeh, we're sensible people!"

Again the babble burst forth. Almost every one of those present came from the extreme south of the county, or the quays of the city. Worthless *sugawns* according to the expressive Irish phrase, and therefore utterly unconnected with any organised attempt at revolution and of course utter strangers to Harrigan, who saw with delight that his work was done.

They were near Carrickbyrne when a perfect tumult of running men overtook them, the first runaways from the last effort made to retake New Ross, many of them not having gone further than the Three Bullet Gate, and their furious yells roused the drooping passions of their comrades.

"It's all Bagnal Harvey's fault," shrilled one, "he sold us, the English are killin' the prisoners, man, woman and child! They are all cut to pieces by the bloody ruffians; hurry on, they'll be here in a minute!"

They were quite close to the recently abandoned camp on Carrickbyrne Hill spotted with ashes of myriad fires, the flanks blackened here and there where the furze had been burnt away in broad patches. Close at hand was a knot of houses with a tree or two, and below the gleam

of ordered pikes marked the position of Scullabogue House and steading.

Springing upon a fragment of shattered wall, Harrigan extended his arms. "Listen!" he shouted, "where are ye goin'? Is it to get yerselves identified?"

The men shrank back; those who were prepared by his lurid word-painting swore bitterly. He folded his arms and looked upon the flinching crowd.

"Every one of ye knows what sort of fair play a poor man gets in a law court at the best of times, if he has an Orangeman or the like against him," said Harrigan, as they crowded around him, staring upward into his resolute face, the one fixed thing in that whirlpool of rage and fear. "Think well before you go over there, I say, God knows —maybe ye needn't be so cautious, for if ye're brought before 'em in the good time coming, they'll identify ye, if they get the wink, though they never clapped eyes on ye before!"

"Look here, my hardy boy, we're not fools either!" howled the most besottedly stupid of the party, brandishing his pike. "Come along, boys, an' we'll take care they won't get the chanst to perjure themselves!" And he dashed away with some score at his heels.

Presently they returned. "The prisoners are in the barn beyant," yelled one, "an' Murphy of Loughnagreer is guarding 'em. He have the pikemen out, so we couldn't get at 'em—he won't do anything till he gets an order."

"Aye, from Bagnal Harvey?" remarked Harrigan with a fiendish leer, "and he'll do it too, after fooling ye already!"

A tumultuous council was now held, and at last it was suggested to Harrigan that he should go and say a priest gave the necessary command, but this for very obvious reasons he declined to do, though at the risk of losing control over the half-maddened men. But, after a while the man who had warned him agreeing to go as if with a command from one of the patriot priests, they drifted

back to the barn, clamouring for blood. Ere long they wavered back again down the road, having actually come to blows with the guard. Harrigan looked anxiously over his shoulder, and then took something from his pocket, something which he swiftly rubbed to brightness on his coat sleeve.

Suddenly a man running furiously appeared, running as he had run ever since he left New Ross, his arm in a sling. Harrigan smiled, his face lost its pallor. "He has something to tell!" he shouted, "I see it in his eye."

The baffled rabble caught at the words, and formed confusedly across the path of the powder-blackened figure, but he never altered his pace until he dashed against the line.

"Arrah, stand back there!" he yelled, "ye don't know what's goin' on below at New Ross—I want to see John Murphy!"

"He's protecting the Orange witnesses against the coming trials," sneered Harrigan, "and he hasn't time to listen to *rameis*. But get up on this wall and tell your story!"

As if still carried forward by the momentum of his headlong race, the other bounded on the wall, a fearful incarnation of anger and fear, and talking in Irish, poured out the terrible narrative of the burnt hospital.

It was the last element needed to set the wavering purpose of the now maddened throng, and wheeling round, they dashed headlong for the barn of Scullabogue, red murder in every heart, vengeance on every tongue. Again John Murphy bid his pikemen close up, but they were beaten back by the very impetus of the rush, and a furious altercation took place around him.

"I'll do no such thing without orders!" shouted Murphy for the twentieth time.

"And you have orders, my buck," replied Harrigan, determined to make a supreme effort. "Father Brien of Taghmon has sent me with express command to have the

lot of 'em put out of the way. Everything is lost by G—d, but we won't leave a bridge to the enemy. And if you doubt my warrant — there it is!" he continued, displaying the pyx he had taken from the hand of the skeleton in the Hermitage.

Even as he spoke a terrible scream burst from the barn, and Kitty Creagh's face appeared at one of the upper windows.

"Harrigan!" she shouted, "Harrigan the devil! Oh if you are a man, mercy, mercy! Father Brien couldn't send that message, if he tried to, his tongue wouldn't speak the words! John Murphy, for the sake of Christ who died on the Tree, don't disgrace yourself, man, but wait for half-an-hour!"

But neither John Murphy nor his two or three hundred pikemen could do that now though their own mothers were in the barn, the mass of raving men that hemmed them round had dashed them aside, or had trampled them under foot almost before she had ceased speaking. The door was wrenched open, and those nearest pulled forth and shot, while mounted on ladders, frenzied men, impatient of delay and fearful of interruption, flung bundle after bundle of blazing straw upon the easily ignited thatch, which was soon flaming upward to the ridge pole.

Then began a scene which haunted the imaginations of those who witnessed it. From that house rose a shriek so awful that the murderers paid a tribute to humanity in short panting curses even while they plied their evil task. The agonized cry was echoed from below, despairing as that which may sometimes be heard at sea when, whirled before the fury of the storm, a rudderless ship drifts to its doom, and the muffled scream of drowning men from under battened hatches rings over the boiling tempest to be remembered for ever.

Foremost in the work of death was Harrigân, stabbing furiously through the slits in the barn wall with his sword,

and when that broke, with a pike; the fire above and beneath driving the unhappy wretches immured within round and round the blistering stones that prisoned them, as they flung their shrinking bodies against the door now shut again, the mad rushes tearing one hinge away, though outside there were hungry pikes awaiting, and through a shivered panel at the threshold a little child crept forth into the sunlight and was transfixed by a pike, and lay there, its innocent blood smoking to Heaven.

The interior was on fire now, but Kitty still clung to her position by the dormer window, calling for Devereux and Harvey, Harrigan and his cut-throats undisguisedly mocking her, until a merciful bullet pierced her heart, and she dropped back into the swirling eddies of smoke and flame only a few minutes before Devereux's horse swept up to scatter the mob of raging men. In a trice the blazing door was dashed aside, but even the stoutest there recoiled a moment from the scene which met his view, until conquering the revulsion of nature, they heedfully dragged the writhing horror into the light of day, being in time to rescue two or three, old Nancy by the irony of fate amongst them.

That night Mr Harvey encamped on Carrickbyrne, and many councils were held, Father Philip Roche was elected general, and the siege of New Ross determined on; it was furthermore decided that Devereux should sail for France next day with verbal instructions.

Dispirited, well-nigh heart broken, Devereux having seen the charred remains of Kitty Creagh decently interred, with a cross made from shattered pike poles at the head, flung himself upon a pile of heather, but not to sleep. The thought of Irene Neville alone and unprotected in leagured Ross harassing him, he rose, and advancing through the fitfully slumbering camp, sought a point whence he could dimly see the surrounding country lying around that smoking town where his lady was

pining. He looked at his watch, it wanted two hours of twelve. "Pshaw," he muttered, "it is only a risk the more, should aught happen, the boat at Fethard can sail without me—there are messengers enough. To see thee once, Irene, only once before I go!"

All his life accustomed to prompt action, he turned on his heel, went back to his rude tent, buckled on his sword, looked to the priming of his pistols, and saddling the horse which had borne him from New Ross earlier in the day, rode softly off along the road towards Corbet Hill.

It was a sad ride, with the consciousness of defeat heavy upon his spirit, and the desperateness of his cause in face of the crime about which he hardly dared to think, but true to his soldier training, he strove to banish those gnawing thoughts, remembering that while there were arms in Irish hands on Irish soil, hope was not gone from Ireland. The velvet pall of darkness lay soft on the country side, and were it not for the *débris* of the retreat to Carrickbyrne, the stir and fury of the day might have seemed a fevered dream as he looked towards the dim outlines of the groves beside the Barrow, and the denser shadows showing where the town lay.

As he approached it, cautiously skirting Summer Hill, the thought of how he should enter came before him with almost paralysing suddenness. He had, it is true, a dim idea that he should be able to find some boat moored at the river side, but as he rode along the bank, straining his eyes, a dark object in mid-stream made him turn aside with frowning brow. It was one of the numerous gun-boats which Johnson used to patrol the Barrow. Presently he came upon the first actual sign of the strife that had been—a dead man's body doubled together in a little cart, from whose shafts the horse had been taken. In the distance there was an intermittent glow, like that caused by the bellows of a smithy, and he knew it marked the Gate. There was, too, the sound of creaking pulleys

from the river, where something white was showing wing-like above the water, and he understood that the gunboat was taking advantage of the wind from the sea to move nearer the town, though keeping off from the bank.

Carefully noting the position of the cart, and an empty cabin some distance away, he rode towards it and tethered his horse in a little coppice bordering an ozier field; then he moved cautiously towards the entrance.

His path was now dotted with dead men, and once tripping over a disembowelled horse he lay silent, expecting an outcry, but none followed. Coming closer, he waited and listened in the deep shadows of a fence; no sentry's tramp struck upon his ear, no challenge rang from the wall—instead he heard the lapping of the Barrow gliding by, the lowing of cattle from Oatlands, the flapping of the sail as the gunboat warped slowly up stream. He moved forward more rapidly. Behind the Gate a watch-fire was burning sullenly, and as its dull flame rose and fell, he could distinguish several recumbent scarlet forms about it, evidently the guard, drunk, or utterly worn out by the thirteen hours of desperate fighting they had encountered.

For a minute he hung there in the shadow debating with himself, then, pistol in hand, he passed shadow-like across the wavering flood of light that came from the open entrance, whose shattered gates depended from their hinges, and silently flitted within, taking advantage of the shade flung by adjacent pieces of masonry, and actually passing the guard drowsing by the fire, entered New Ross again.

The extreme darkness of the night which favoured him up to this threatened now to betray him, for he had not gone far when he stumbled over a heap of slain, and the mishap drew yawning curses from a group of soldiers thrown down upon the stones of the street in the midst of the dead, so utterly exhausted that had one hundred men been at Devereux's elbow, the history of New Ross would have been changed. Experienced as he was, the

soldier thought one instant of returning to Carrickbyrne Hill and bringing what force he could to renew the fight, but a moment's reflection dismissed the hope, though had he acted on the impulse, it is at least probable that the struggle for freedom, whose success hung again and again upon the turn of a hair, would have had a different issue.

Stepping cautiously among the sleepers, he at length reached a comparatively open space, and turned up Cross Lane which led to the spot where he had parted with Irene, but presently he was obliged to retrace his steps, so choked was the narrow way with dead. He advanced along the quay towards Michael Street which happened to be a little clearer, dimly discerning on either side great gaps in the house frontage flooded by shadow, a naked gable end showing here and there against the distant stars, or the gaunt ribs of rafters rising above the smoke-reek surging sluggishly upward from the basement.

He turned down Michael Lane, but again piles of corpses three feet deep made progress difficult, yet persevering he reached Neville Street. Here the houses had been completely gutted by the fire, and more than once a veritable barricade was formed across the way by a fallen front which had dropped bodily outwards, an evil-smelling cloud of smoke coiling heavily over the wreck of what once was floor and roof and rafter.

At intervals he saw bodies of soldiers, but passed unchallenged, while sometimes pale-faced women, who had returned in the wake of the victors, were to be seen groping amid the ruins of their homes, or heard sobbing feebly in the darkness as they wandered on, reckless of brutal oath or more brutal jest, seeking for a clue to the once familiar walls which had bounded their simple world. At Chapel Lane, however, he again turned back, the awful carnage choking the streets there, and dispirited returned to Mary Street.

He had searched thus for about an hour, when, on

passing a house, he heard tones which made his heart beat faster. The dearest voice on earth was repeating somewhere in the darkness a prayer. Then came guttural accents, Death's hand lying heavily upon the labouring tongue, and he knew them too. "Mat!" he murmured, "going fast!"

Again the most beautiful of all prayers, the Pater Noster, reached his ear in Irene's voice. Turning eagerly, he listened, peering into the obscurity, and praying that he might not be deceived. Just before him a timbered gable rose against the sky, deep masses of shadow in its casements and in its doorway, which was set high in the wall. Moving a little to one side, he saw the banner-like square of a sign-board projecting against the star-powdered heaven. He guessed the identity of the place now, and recollected that a flight of steps approached the door. Groping forward cautiously, he found them, and began to ascend carefully, for the hand-rail had been shot away, and dead bodies cumbered the steps. Presently, he came upon the space before the entrance, slippery with blood, and barricaded by the scarlet and cross-belts of slain soldiery. He entered, and, drawing his tinder-box, ignited the shredded linen to a dull glow, seeing by patches, as it were.

The hall was wide, and a shattered settle that had once held the village gossips was occupied by the body of a dying soldier, who opened his glazing eyes with a faint moan of "Water, for God's sake!" and then commenced to sing in a singularly sweet tone a paraphrase of the "Dies Irae." The other voices were silent, but Devereux, listening intently, heard the hoarse rattle of parting breath. Gradually the awful hymn died down into nothingness, but the breathing went on a little longer until it merged into a long sigh; there was a gasping cough, an invocation to Saints Patrick, Bridget and Culumkil, and then silence again.

"Who is there?" said Irene's voice.

"Irene!" cried Devereux.

A sob wavered to his ear. "Hush!" she whispered. "Nay, do not show a light; there are none here save the dead and dying. Poor Mat is just gone, God be with him! Oh, is it not terrible? Nothing remains but sorrow!"

She felt her way to him boldly in the darkness; he caught her hand, and drew her to him; they stood there a moment, heart to heart.

The dying man on the settle began to sing one of Lysight's gayest caprices; in that gasping tone, it was worse than blasphemy.

"Is it not awful?" she whispered. "He was a stage player; he recited one complete scene from 'The Critic' just now, and indeed I almost laughed—it was so perfect! Is it not terrible to die like that—so much cleverness, so much hopelessness? Perhaps God will make allowances? How different from poor Mat's death!"

Devereux guided her gently to the entrance.

"Have you seen Miss Phaire?" she asked.

"No, no," he replied impatiently. "I thought she was with you."

"Yes, but we were separated again, and then Mat found me; he was wounded, and I helped him here—that was only a few hours ago, and he is dead now. Can it all be true?"

"Aye, because it is all sad," replied her lover.

She sighed, then she turned to him. "You have lost, have you not?" she murmured; "the soldiers are everywhere."

"I said I would return," he rejoined softly.

She pressed close to him; he put his arm about her waist, and they stole down the steps into the street.

CHAPTER XXVII

"WHERE to now?" said Devereux mechanically.

She began to cry. "Where, ah where?" she sobbed.

He soothed her as well as he could, and they went down the street aimlessly.

"Mother, father, all, all gone!" she murmured. "What is there left? And now Aunt Prue——Oh God, what a thing war is!"

Devereux set his lips. It occurred to him that thousands of women as innocent, as pure, were thinking the same thought at that very moment. But he drew her to him and kissed her. "You have—me," he said simply. She leaned towards him, and their lips again met. Hand in hand they went on a little space.

"You came back for me?" said Irene Neville, with the divine accent of childishness that sometimes pants in a woman's voice.

He pressed her hand. "Aye," he said, "and would have done so if all hell stood in the way."

They were now near the Main Guard, and skirting the heaps of dead fringing the silent guns surrounded by their slumbering sentries, the girl looking up at the faint clusters of stars overhead as if seeking for guidance.

"Irene," said Devereux, "I am going back to France to-morrow; there are boats waiting at Fethard—will you come with me—my wife?"

She did not answer at once, the daring and the unexpectedness of the proposal startling her; the next moment, just as they rounded a corner, a lady's accents rang out, querulous, but unmistakable.

"No, no, Major Heathcote," she said, "the girl cannot

have left the town. I am sure she must be somewhere near the bridge; she could not go without me, she could not leave me here, infirm and suffering—it is not in her nature."

"Aunt Prudence!" cried Irene impulsively. Devereux loosed her hand, and drew his sword with a little sigh.

The light of an approaching lantern flitting over the groups of dead became fixed.

"It is her voice, oh my poor child!" cried Miss Prudence. "Oh, Major Heathcote, for God's sake come hither. Irene, Irene!"

The girl made a step in the direction of the voice and stopped, then she took Devereux's arm. Very gently he disengaged her soft hand, kissing it as he did so, and advancing a few paces, said quietly, "Miss Neville is here, madam, quite safe. Have a care, our countrymen are very thick hereabouts."

Miss Prudence uttered another little cry of thankfulness. "Oh, my poor darling," she sobbed, "lift the light, Major Heathcote; ah, God be thanked!"

"Go," said Devereux imperiously. "It is better so!"

"But you?" murmured Irene.

He laughed shortly, and lifted the good sword, whose blade caught the light as Heathcote advanced, guiding Miss Prue amid the wreck and carnage cumbering the street. The next instant Irene and her aunt were locked in each other's arms.

The sudden jerk of the lantern, as it flashed upon Devereux's alert face, showed that Heathcote had started; Devereux did not move.

"I am—we are indebted to you, sir, again," said Miss Prue, looking up, her poor unroughed, fever-flushed features drawn into a smile. "Accept the only thing we have to offer now—thanks."

"No man could wish for more," said Devereux.

"Ralph," cried Miss Prudence, turning to Heathcote impulsively, "this gentleman has been most kind to us, although not—not on the King's side."

A bitter jest rose to Devereux's lips, but he repressed, though he could not check the short laugh it wrung from him.

"Perhaps he may wish to retire?" continued Miss Prudence hurriedly. "I am sure he can rely upon any protection we can extend. He has deserved it a thousand times."

"Mr Devereux and I met before," said Heathcote somewhat stiffly, "he can be generous, and shall find that as far as we can prove it his generosity was not in vain. I presume, sir, that you wish to leave the town? Pray command my services."

The tone irritated Devereux, who was human and a lover.

"On what shall I rely?" he asked.

"Upon an Englishman's honour," replied Heathcote proudly.

Devereux laughed. "I was brought up a Catholic," he said bitterly, "and know the gibes to which my co-religionists are subjected for believing, against the evidence of sense. They and I would deserve the cruellest of those taunts if we affected to believe upon the authority you offer, in what bitter experience tells us does not exist. So, call up your women-torturers, or let them sleep a little longer. I would not cross yonder street to avoid your enmity or to gain your friendship. Alone I came here, and alone I shall go hence, relying upon nothing but my sword and my heart."

A light foot-fall pattered after him in the warm darkness —a soft hand clasped his. "No, not alone," said Irene Neville recklessly, "if you but say the word!"

He clasped her to him and released her. "If she wished to come she would have done so of her own free will," he thought, "she would not leave the decision to me."

"Irene," said Miss Phaire, "are you mad, child? I understand. But Mr Devereux's life hangs upon a thread, if those savages at the Priory Gate should find him, we

could not protect him, you would but embarrass his progress, not assure his safety. Hark, they are changing guard! Good-bye, Mr Devereux, you are a man of honour, though an enemy to your country. God send you safe, and take an old woman's blessing on your road."

This simple speech, perhaps the simplest Miss Prudence had ever uttered, touched the young man, and salved the sharp sense of desertion. He led Irene towards her.

"We all need blessing," he said with a sad laugh, "and I thank you. We may, who knows, meet again under happier skies, and talk of these things? If not—we have played our parts and not ignobly."

He turned abruptly, and strode into the darkness again, directing his steps instinctively down Friary Street where Mr Gilfillan's hostel was smoking dismally.

As he approached the Priory Gate, he heard a loud imperious voice rating the guard there, and slackening his pace, threaded his way to the quay wall which was broken away in places, like that flanking the Gate towards the river, he gently lifted himself on the broken masonry, and peered over into the darkness.

Just below him there were lanterns moving to and fro, and he heard the wash of water along a boat's side as she grated on the shingles a little beyond the wall. By degrees he distinguished objects, and saw several figures moving from the Gate to a spot of light which he guessed indicated the position of the unseen craft, wearily carrying what appeared to be small cases upon their shoulders.

"That makes two dozen," he heard a voice say, the voice of General Johnson. "We shall want more, was the resin mixed as I directed Sergeant Hamilton?"

"Yes, sir," replied one of the men repressing a yawn, "a couple of these will keep blazing fifteen minutes and more, I am sorry they could not bring the gun-boat to the quay, but that smack foundered alongside the steps might have fouled her, and the wind is changing."

"Better as it is," answered the other, "there is less risk,

I fear those casks of powder she has just shipped are very insecurely stowed. Hah, who goes there?"

"Friend to the guard!" cried another voice from the darkness of the flowing river, and Devereux heard the purring of oars in muffled row-locks.

A moment later Hamilton's lifted lantern flickered upon a small boat coming alongside. She contained two persons, the rower, and a man who sat wrapped in a cloak at the stern, steering. There was a sharp order, and a few soldiers levelled their muskets. The cloaked man laughed. "You keep good watch, General Johnson?" he said.

The other swore. "And need to," he replied, "they were sleeping most luxuriously only five minutes ago. Well, Mr Gash, what news?"

"They will not attempt any attack from the Kilkenny side," answered the latter, coming forward, his sword scabbard clinking as he stepped from the prow. "I landed, and went as far as Glenmore, all was quiet, we then slipped by Slieve Kielter, where they seem to have a sort of camp, but nothing doing."

"Then, we need not fear an attack to-night?"

"No, they have even fallen back from Corbet Hill, but the country yonder must be held by them. The river is quite clear. Ah, you are packing fire-shells—What is that?"

There was a slight pause and then the clink of arms, the men passing to and fro looked towards the shrouded country apprehensively.

"I'd swear I heard something yonder," continued the spy, pointing to the shattered wall where Devereux crouched, his face white with fury, a pistol in his hand.

"Pshaw, 'tis some poor wretch trying to get away," remarked Johnson, "there are plenty of wounded here."

The spy's life hung on the pulling of a trigger, but the watcher could not bring himself to fire, a dog howled dismally from an alley behind.

"Ah, it is only a cur howling over some croppy," said Gash laughing. "By Jove, General, there is no time to lose, this is the morning breeze."

"All ready, sir," said a deferential voice in the darkness.

"Ah, that is right; as soon as you have shipped the ammunition, Hamilton, bid the captain set sail at once. By daylight you should be off Duncannon, then make for Fethard at once—there's quite a fleet of croppy boats there, and set 'em afire. By the way, Mr Gash——"

The words were cut short by a cry from the latter who fell suddenly struck down by a pistol butt, the next instant the light Hamilton held aloft was kicked into space, and amid a storm of oaths Devereux darted towards the heavily laden barge sinking stern deep in the murmuring Barrow.

A soldier at the prow raised his lantern and flashed it in the advancing man's face, but Devereux's pistol flamed at the same moment and he fell with a cry of—"Devereux the croppy!" It was Harrison.

"Devereux! A thousand pounds reward!" yelled an officer who had come up from the Gate, and dropping a shell, he ran forward with drawn sword as the fugitive sprang on the plank which had been laid to the float.

"A thousand pounds!" shouted another. "Cut him down, Thorncroft! Stand, you coward!"

"Ireland for ever!" roared Devereux in answer, and wheeling round, he dashed down the boards again, then the swift rasp of steel in parry and thrust clinked and jarred as pursuer and pursued stamped to and fro on the shingle.

"Hold him, Thorncroft!" shouted Gash who had staggered to his feet. "A light, a light!"

A hoarse cry from the darkness by the water, and a loud cheer of defiance followed. Hamilton who had meanwhile relit the lantern at the guard fire, ran forward recklessly, some soldiers at his heels. They found Thorncroft bleeding profusely from a wound on

the head, while Devereux was straining against a sweep with which he was pushing off the barge.

"Steady now; fire," shouted Hamilton, "Stand out of the line, Pickering!"

Dropping the sweep, Devereux, his sword dangling at his wrist, drew a pistol, and glanced over his shoulder. The cry was addressed to a soldier who had been engaged packing shells at the stern, and who now came creeping along by the gunwale, sword in hand. The insurgent's bullet shattered the lantern Hamilton raised, but a ball tore across his own cheek at the same moment, and caused him to stagger back along the mimic forecastle towards his advancing foe, who swore an incautious oath of triumph, that rose into a shriek as Devereux recovering himself, lounged, and he reeled over the side, his death scream bubbling in the Barrow water closing above his doomed head.

The barge which had swung out under the impetus of Devereux's push, was now borne inward again towards the bank where he could hear feet rushing rapidly. Fitting the sweep to the stern notch, he propelled the lumbering craft into mid-stream, and saw in the distance something white shimmer like a ghostly face above the water, and knew it was a top-sail being shaken out.

There was no time to lose. The confused idea which had made him choose the barge instead of the lighter craft, quickly hardened into design. Throwing down the sweep, he reloaded his pistol, and drew forth his tinder box, swearing fiercely, the rush of churned water behind showing that the small boat was pursuing.

"I should have sunk her," he muttered, "but if the fellow had shown fight, the delay would have spoiled everything. God grant they will not hit me before the shells fire!"

Seizing one of the fire-balls, which had been tilted loose by the fall of Harrison, he ignited the fuse and thrust it amid the others, a bullet whizzing past his ear as the following boat collided with the barge.

Cooler than he had ever been before in his life, he shot the man who was rowing, wrenched the oar projecting over the side from his nerveless grasp, and pushed the boat off not a second too soon, for a soldier who had rushed to the bow fired at such close quarters that the powder blackened one side of the fugitive's face ere the darkness hid him.

There was a heavy splash and a cry, Devereux laughed tauntingly, and strove to guide the barge with the oar, the sweep having drifted away, towards the shadow ahead which was shifting its position with a sound of clanking chains. Then the fire-shell lit up. The flame revealed the silent woods, glared on the river, caught the small boat drifting helplessly with its knot of soldiers, one of whom was clumsily paddling with the remaining oar towards their comrade who had overbalanced himself, as he fought madly for his squalid life in that red current, and flung into startling relief the hull and upper sails of the gun-boat lying right across the way.

Working furiously, Devereux urged the lurching craft towards her, hoping that she would strike and fire the ship ere a bullet laid him low. The creaking he had heard was the chain of her windlass lifting the anchor, and as she drifted with her bow towards the Kilkenny side, he could distinguish excited voices giving contradictory orders.

The barge was coming close now, and perceiving that it was being steered by a man in French uniform, a sailor shouted to head down the river. Had the suggestion been obeyed at once, they might readily have escaped the danger they partly understood, but the soldiers yelled to keep as they were, and a foolish attempt was made to tack towards the right bank, so that the barge might pass astern. Seeing this, Devereux redoubled his efforts, and the huge boat lumbered nearer, then the captain himself put down the helm, Devereux straining every nerve to imitate this new movement.

On the New Ross side there was shouting, but a belt

of trees which then ran close to the water's edge gave him shelter in that direction, and the fire which the soldiers had recommenced was hardly dangerous, owing to the oscillation of the small boat making her zig-zag course down the river, but the crew of the ship, fully alive to their danger by this, were aiming at him from the yards and shrouds. The affair was fast becoming a matter of seconds.

The gun-boat swung round, and to his intense delight headed for the New Ross bank—the barge must strike her amidships. Just then a number of fire-balls exploded, and the boat was itself in an instant a mass of liquid flame. Scorched already, Devereux dashed to the prow, seeking for some rope by which he might grappel the blazing danger to the vessel. He could find none, but it mattered little, the barge was alongside. Then he leaped on the bow, a mark for every musket there, the insane joy of defiance lighting his taunting face. It might have been a second while he stood thus watching the distance between ship and boat diminish, but in that lightning space of time he weighed his chance of reaching the water alive. His sword was in his hand, and a quick slash cut loose the dangling scabbard; then with the good blade across his mouth, he dived from the blazing mass, down, down, in a curving line into the mystery of the swirling water which bore him onward with bursting temples and drumming ears, as he swam convulsively in his high boots beneath the swaying vessel's keel, until just before consciousness began to dull away he struck out for the surface.

There was a sudden thunder in his ears, like the roaring of surf upon an unseen shore, and as suddenly he felt the night-wind playing on brow and cheek, and the sweet air of the upper world filling his lung again. God was very good. One side of his head was ringing, and on looking up he saw a curving black wall shelving away to heights that were yellow with a blaze of noontide bright-

ness. Then he understood that he was not clear of the ship which had drifted with the current; he heard, too, yells of confusion as the burning barge crashed and ground against her tarred side, climbed by tarantula spirtles of wriggling fire, and an excited voice thundered out—

"Ho, there! Hard a-port! Fend off that blasted thing; lively with buckets! Hard a-port, I say!"

"She has not way enough on," roared another voice. "Beach her; she'll go up in a minute with all this powder aboard."

Devereux had the sensation of being passed by a wall which was slowly bringing him to the New Ross side, and understanding that if he was to avoid the barge he must be quick, he struck out in a slanting line for the shore, a spreading fan of light illuminating the reaches of the river beyond, as the ship slowly cleared the heavy craft, intermittent splashes showing that her perilous cargo was being flung overboard.

He had not gone far when a bullet ripped along the water close by his head, and a yell proclaimed that he was seen.

As the otter circles and swims before the dogs, so Devereux turning swam for the shelter of the trees near the shore, amid whose branches he could presently hear the scorched yards of the gun-boat crashing as she grounded. On he swam, hoping now against hope that he should escape, a stray beam of light now and again catching the blade of his sword, while he desperately forged nearer the drooping shadows, and stray bullets hissed past him, making momentary tracks such as the water-hen leaves scurrying 'twixt willow and wavelet. At length his foot struck upon a rocky ledge—he was ashore, a spent ball striking his bridle arm ere he plunged into the underwood.

He was on land once more, walking the pleasant earth as he had never hoped to do again, and his spirits rose,

though a cruel foe hung bandog like at his heels, and the woman for whose smile he would have died remained in the enemy's camp.

He sighed, thinking of her, and bit the sigh in two with a fiery curse. "Let her go," he muttered; "I'd have done the same for the poorest maid in Ireland; but all the same—Ah, Irene Neville, I was the good friend to you to-day, and you preferred your own to me when it came to the pinch. Well, God knows you were in your right—But why did you kiss me, woman alive?"

He had emerged upon a little meadow, and looked around eagerly. Just in front was the banked-up side of a ditch. He peered over and saw the dim road clear. In a moment he was across, and was splashing through some marshy ground adjoining, where he again paused amid the high rushes, striving to guide himself by the shadowy outlines around and the stars above, while from the river came yells and the crossing of questions, and in the darkness there was a glow beyond the tree tops which hid the drifting barge whose blazing mass was already drawing curious eyes from many a grove and hill-top in the barony.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I must have passed it," he said; "there was a house——"

Feet pattered on the road, then there was a crash and an oath; a man who had been flung violently to earth somewhere in the darkness, was speaking about many grave subjects in an exceedingly fluent manner, and an authoritative voice ordered a "damned cart" to be pulled into the ditch.

Devereux smiled. "Egad, I was not far wrong," he muttered. "They fell over the cart, and broke their shins—would God, it was their necks!"

At that moment a ray from the burning barge, gliding past a clearing some quarter of a mile away, fell on something white a second ere it flashed off over the countryside. Breathing quickly, he hurried forward. Ah,

there was the little cabin amid its trampled oziers, and the thicket where he had left his horse. Advancing cautiously, he found the animal, and, taking from the holster a flask, poured out a gobletful of brandy, adding some powder from a water-soaked cartridge. Then he bound his arm, which was beginning to pain him somewhat, loosed the steed, leaped into the saddle, sword in hand, ready to dare and do again for Ireland.

One brief instant he sat there in thought. To ride back towards Carrickbyrne would be to court danger, and could have no good purpose, since he should start for Fethard at dawn; but, New Ross lay that way, and the temptation came back upon him to return and hear from her own lips—what?"

He frowned, and, illuminated by one of those rare introspective flashes which show our tragic follies stripped of their clinging purple, turned his horse's head away, laughing bitterly.

There was a dull clatter in the distance, the clatter of horse hoofs, and, from the grove by the river, shouts. The way to New Ross was barred, that by the Barrow on to Whitechurch would be impracticable presently. A rocket crashed into the air, and glistened on his laced coat; he struck out for the road, and galloped towards Cracken Hill, but not fast enough to escape a buzzing cloud of bullets that cut a bridle rein, and shore a bedraggled epaulet from his shoulder. A hoarse cheer answered the volley, and a jingle of accoutrements showed through the clatter of hoofs—cavalry were in pursuit.

Waving his sword, he rode on with a contemptuous laugh, as two or three breathless yeomen who had left the road, attracted by the rocket, came plunging back to take a flying shot at horse and rider as they flitted past. Again Devereux escaped, but his gallant mare swerved, nearly unseating him, and he knew that she was hit. But her good blood was up, and she sped on with hardly

diminished stride until the road began to turn from the river past Cracken Hill, when Devereux guessed by her breathing that she was hurt to death; and, although he could hear the thud and jingle of his pursuers, he did not urge the straining creature.

"She has done her best," he murmured huskily; "I must die some time; let me not win a few years longer by the torture of a brave steed!"

Still, the persistent clatter behind chilled him as it grew, and the love of life wrestled with the haughty impulse which had held his hand half an hour before, and now bade him spare the dying horse reeling her death fall. Ere long he slipped from the saddle, and with his desperate face to the coming foe, stood waiting while she stumbled forward, and dropped down across the way, sobbing heavily. He put his hand to his waist belt, but withdrew it, both pistols were gone. He shrugged his shoulders, the drenched coat catching him at the neck, a wet cuff drooped over his sword hilt, he turned it back, smiling grimly. The clatter had become a continuous thread of sound.

"A troop of 'em, ecod," he murmured. "Aha, welcome, old bird! Is it my last day?"

A cock's gay cry, sprightly as a bugle blast, sounded shrilly and drifted into the grey above, the morn had come.

The galloping hoofs were quite close now, and then unexpectedly a single riderless horse swept round the curve of the road at racing speed. Devereux stood on one side; as she came abreast of him she swerved, catching sight of the other steed stretched across the way, and the waiting man actually leaped into the saddle. The fence at his side was not high, and he put her to it with a shout. She floundered over desperately, and he guided her along the adjoining field, turning her back on the highway at the next fence, not daring to head for Slieve Kielter on account of the bogs.

The pattering of hoofs behind grew confused; at a gallop he sped down the winding road, but soon the noise recovered its rhythm and force, and he heard the voice of Gash high in breathless fury, urging the chase.

"Aha, you bastard cur, I wouldn't doubt ye!" hissed the fugitive, shaking his sword. "Luttrell, Luttrell! God grant that you are ten seconds ahead of 'em when the end comes!"

It did not come quickly, but the daylight did as the pursuing route thundered on the road to Whitechurch, and the sunbeams were flinging long morning shadows across the flat summit of Slieve Kielter. It began to draw near, however, as they galloped down the narrow way from the village, when just on reaching a cross one, a young soldier whose splendid horse had outdistanced Rosinante closed on the fugitive, and was sent headlong to earth with riven throat, never again to feel the pride that glances across the ordered ranks of war, never again to hear the tinkle of his native burn or watch the sunshine upon snow-capped mountains.

Devereux had now left the road, and was spurring on towards Dunbrody, at the opposite of a little creek formed by a small stream, and an arm of the sea, beyond which he could descry the sloping sward where in desolate beauty rose the ruins of an abbey that had once acknowledged one of his race as lord. Crossing the stream he grew swiftly weary, and rode on with slowly gathering rein, for the desire to kill had grown strong within him, and he was as I have said, tired of being hunted.

"There must be a good number of ye," he said, looking over his shoulder for the first time, "or ye would not have followed so far. The more the merrier, I shall not want company at my wake! 'Sdeath, my arm swells woundedly! No matter, 'twill suffice a few minutes longer!"

He rode on, singing a song in Irish, a gay carol, but with something of strength in it, like the gleam of steel

under gold, and beat time with the flat of his sword on the stirrup iron.

"God rest my mother," he murmured, "she was a decent woman, I wonder what she will say when she sees me lying yonder without a grave over me, and the sea-gulls hovering in the air. Perhaps the old monks will say a prayer, knowing I had not much time for that—no, nor much care either. There must be something across, else the birds would not rise like that, maybe some other poor croppy. Well, however one dies and however one lies within the four walls of Ireland, it is good, if only one dies for her. Egad, they are not in a hurry!"

He was right as to the number of his pursuers, they were at least a score, yeomen, Midlothians, dragoons, but riding in a straggling line, the rear being far behind. The pace too was not killing, Mr Gash alone riding full speed. Indeed, since the mishap at the cross-roads it had been regulated by the fugitive so that now Gash was several lengths ahead, going at a rate which would have brought him saddle skirts with Devereux if the latter, taking advantage of some rising ground, had not wheeled and charged with a ringing shout.

Other eyes besides those of the red-coats were watching that charge, though he knew it not, and it was afterwards told at many a camp-fire, how he rode Gash down, man and horse going over before the fury of the reckless impact, and how he thundered at the rest, one against twenty, how they closed on him until the road was choked by the press of struggling men and rearing chargers, how he broke through, wounded it is true, but furiously courting death, and charged again, for he had willed to die, and the dauntless Irish heart which God had given, asked only to fight on so long as the clay which clothed it might endure.

Across the sun-lit glory of the morning fields came a cheer, the wind bore it gaily, and the Barrow below twinkled as if in answer to the pikeheads glittering above that shout. The cavalry heard and saw, and those of

them who were not actually engaged, an influential majority, halted instantly. They had come a long distance through a hostile country, they were weary, and in sooth they had little stomach for fighting on the top of the morning. By luck, one of them had a trumpet, and sounded a recall; the combatants who could obey retreated, jumping their horses over the writhing forms of their comrades, and the peasant force of pikemen coming up the hill misunderstanding the bugle notes, halted, thus giving them time, Mr Gash coming last, a sorry figure, holding to his saddle pommel, and swearing the white oaths of baffled rage.

The soldiers did not tarry, the insurgents could not pursue, and presently they returned to where Devereux still keeping his saddle, was grimly regarding the palpitating forms that lay around the spot where he had charged as he thought to death.

His wounds were attended to roughly but effectively, and as he idly eyed the good steed which had come to him out of the grey of the morning, he noticed a severed picket rope dangling from her neck. At first he smiled, thinking of the owner's haste, but on glancing at the four steeds which remained prizes of war, he did not see similar signs of hurry.

Understanding that he was proceeding to Fethard, the pikemen who belonged to a detachment which had just returned from an ineffective attack upon Waterford, owing to the retreat of the Roscommons from Glenmore, escorted him to the ruined fane of Tintern, and thence he set out towards Fethard, watching the seven castles of Clonmines which he had thought never to see again. Not being badly hurt, he was able to sail, the sea-breeze reviving him wonderfully. But, as Hook Head dwindled and melted into the blue, his last thought, oddly enough, was of the severed picket rope, and the hope came to him as holy Ireland sank behind the sea, that it might have been cut by the hand of Irene.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN her lover had left her Irene Neville rapidly experienced a woman's sudden revulsion of feeling, she honoured to the full his daring, his devotion, his purity of purpose, but she also wished that at the critical moment he had been less unselfish. Her own attitude did not strike her as of supreme consequence, it was, she told herself, for the man to decide.

Under Heathcote's guidance the two women stumbled through the crowded though silent streets, the officer losing his way more than once, a fierce passion of jealousy burning within him, for he understood the girl's quietude, and feared that her heart had irrevocably gone out to the vanquished man. But, when she heard the shouting and the shots, she could restrain herself no longer, and eager to know the worst, ran heedlessly in the direction of the guard-fire by the Priory Gate. She reached it just as the cavalry were being roused to pursue, and she could distinguish some troopers hurriedly saddling their chargers, while close at hand one or two already prepared, were picketed. A spirited mare swerving and snorting there seemed swift, and she put her foot in the dangling stirrup, to ride whither she neither knew nor cared, when the rope still binding the animal caught her eye. She tugged at it, but there was no time to loose the knot. Guided by the fitful gleam of the watch-fire, she flitted to a heap of broken arms tossed together out of the way against a wall; amongst them was a shattered sword, and snatching it up, she severed the cord by one frenzied blow. The creature rearing wheeled round, dashed across the fire,

and vanished into the darkness amid the execrations of the soldiers stumbling about the others.

For a moment the girl stood dazed; but the next instant she was rudely roused by the fierce grip of the dragoon whose horse she loosed. Wrenching herself free, she fled, and darting past a shadow-flooded corner marked by the smouldering wreck of a little shop, ran onward, stumbling often over the dead bodies heaped along the lanes and streets.

She at first thought of crossing to the Kilkenny side, in the forlorn hope of finding the house of one of Miss Prue's tenants, that lady owning a few cabins there, but when she reached the bridge the guard-fire warned her away. At the North Gate she had a similar experience, and turning back wearily, she found a resting-place under the ruined walls of a Friary some distance from the Market Place. She had no desire to search for her aunt now, nor did she care if the worn soldier seeking her through the awful town ever saw her again, every thought of her soul was with Devereux, every power of it merged in one blind prayer for his safety.

Morning came, and noon was blazing from the cloudless sky ere hunger goaded her from her temporary asylum, and seeing some women about, she ventured forth, taking her way towards the Market Square in the wake of the advance guard of the Roscommons who had marched from Waterford. But soon the sight of some yeomen escorting a gory cart piled high with dead bodies, just as she had seen in pictures of the London Plague, made her shrink aside behind the shattered walls of some cabins fringing the irregular enclosure where Johnson's blackened guns were yet looking towards St Mary's churchyard where Gaffney was being hanged. Her new place of refuge was yet, like many more, sending up intermittent clouds of heavy smoke whose dense folds had suggested the idea of concealment, but presently the sound of boisterous laughter made her climb some

rubbish and peer over a wall, and this is what she saw.

There was just opposite a solidly built stone house whose blistered door and blackened window frames showed where the fire had been applied in vain. It was two stories high, and at one of the upper casements she could distinguish a group of officers laughing and looking downward whence a woman's voice was rising in pitiful entreaties to the "gentlemen." Immediately below was another group of soldiers standing in a rude square, and holding something—a carpet—between them, which they were vibrating in a curiously rhythmical fashion, just as she herself had often helped Phyllis to shake the table-cloths in the orchard of Malplaquet.

As the motion went on a quaint-looking object was being tossed up and down, sometimes going high over the shakos, sometimes hardly rising above the dust shaken out by each jerk. At least this was all she saw at first, owing to the smoke of another burning house which soldiers were endeavouring to save with buckets of water that threw white clouds across the field of vision. But when they cleared away in the pulseless air all was made plain, and with a distinctness of outline sharpened by the previous obscurity, she observed that the thing was a woman whom the soldiers were tossing in a carpet!

She was not surprised; she was hardly indignant, the agony and tumult of the preceding day having left little room for such emotions. She simply looked on with a kind of dull curiosity, noting how they yelled delightedly when the motion made the woman sick, and how they stayed their amusement a few seconds to question her or secure a firmer grip.

She heard too with dulled ears the poor creature's cries grow more and more inarticulate until they were only sharp, sudden shrieks jerked out now and then; and it was only when she suddenly fell past the edge of the carpet, which had been withdrawn, that the maiden woke

in Irene, and she screamed aloud, but fortunately her voice was faint through hunger and horror.

The soldiers ceased laughing and stood around the carpet, some with their hands upon their hips, others wiping their brows. An officer bent from the group beside the window, and fumbling for a quizzing glass, put it to his eye. She remembered the gentleman; he was one of those who had dined at Malplaquet not three weeks ago. He began to laugh.

The upper portion of the woman's body stirred slightly. One man went forward and, searching amid the folds of the thin shawl enveloping the head, disclosed the face—it was that of one of the girls from the house by the quarry near Malplaquet. He dropped the head presently, and moved backward, shaking his hands, for they were wet. He looked up at the window whose frame had been completely torn away, and Irene thought she caught the word "dead." In a dazed way she was glad. The officer was not, and he rated the soldiers with drunken solemnity, forgetting that the mishap was entirely due to want of practice; even British warriors with only some two or three weeks' experience could hardly be expected to display the skill of those Eastern professors of the art, who is said can toss a victim so dexterously as to break only an ankle, or every bone, according to direction.

The woman moved again, the limbs twitching convulsively, the hands making pitiful downward gestures Irene understood, for though the last gyrations had twisted the blood-stained garments tightly about the knees, the peasant Iphigenia was solicitous of detail.

A yeoman, who now joined the group, unslung his musket, and fixing the bayonet, prodded the quivering form. In an instant Irene had sprung from her shelter, and ere she could herself comprehend, was clutching the weapon frantically.

"You brute!" she screamed hoarsely. "You shall not!"

"Shan't I?" swore the other, as he reeled drunkenly on the carpet, "an' who are you, for God's sake?"

"Help, help!" gasped Irene, "Are there men here?"

Someone who had been in the house with the officers came rapidly out, his drawn sword in one hand, the other carried in a bandage. There was the sharp click of steel as the blade struck up the musket which the man had snatched from Irene, and the next moment he staggered back before a vigorous kick, while Mr Gash passed his uninjured arm round the girl.

"Call off those curs," he said, addressing the officers at the window, "else General Johnson may hear of it."

"He shall hear of it, sir," exclaimed an officer, one of the Midlothians, who had halted to see the struggle, and he turned away brusquely in the direction of the Market Place.

"Why then, he shall hear of more too," hissed the man, keeping nevertheless at a civil distance, "what right have you to interfere with the King's soldiers in the ex—execution of their duty? Hallo! sink me," he continued, peering into Irene's bloodless face, "didn't I meet ye before, my beauty, serving a rebel gun up yonder? Yes, curse me — Neville Street I remember—I knew ye by the black clothes and the playactin' hop whenever the little gun 'ud jump. Here, boys, shake her up a bit!"

Mr Gash, with his arm aroundIrene's unresponsive side, felt her tremble. Some of the officers, who were glad of an excuse not to strain their authority, now approached, and Gash knew that they would not hesitate to indulge in any brutality if the humour took them.

"Don't ye remember her?" continued the man with a leer, "an' the blue-coated thief that used point the gun, an' she with the spokes in her fist? Ah!"

Mr Gash had darted forward and lunged with deadly celerity at the speaker's throat, but as the doughty warrior ducked his head at the same instant, the sword tore

through teeth and tongue and palate, making his foul mouth one bloody gout.

"You lying cur," he roared, "take that for slandering one of the loyalest ladies of the county! Here, you," he added, wheeling round and sweeping the ring of staring faces with an evil glance, "some of you who have eaten bread at Mr Neville's table—kitchen perhaps—say if you know the contrary to be true?"

The officers did not reply, they resented Mr Gash's manner, and recollected bitterly a certain coarseness of phrase he had permitted himself in conversation with some of them the day before, when prudential considerations had made them slow to follow Johnson's rally. One of them, Plown, looked fixedly at Irene.

"I did hear something about a woman helping the rebels," he said. "Where's Chris Thorncroft, he said she was a damned fine piece too?"

But Lieutenant Thorncroft was at that moment having a bandage renewed, and all the fine pieces in the world would not have tempted him from the grateful quiet of the hospital.

"Yes, there was," said Gash, "a peasant woman named Doyle, what of it?"

Some of the soldiers laughed and looked round, then they drew aside, two officers were approaching rapidly, one the Midlothian, the other Heathcote.

The Scot had evidently explained matters *en route*, for Heathcote's first act was to fell a man who happened to be holding an edge of the carpet, and kick him in the face as he crawled to his feet. Then, recognising Irene, he hurried to her and reassured the sobbing girl.

Gash began to speak of the matter with easy phrases, the Scotch officer heard him with a grim smile.

"If your humanity had been as active, sir, in the cause of this puir lassie," he said, pointing to the dead girl whom some women were bearing away, "it would have saved a life, and us just one shame the more. I saw you

laughing when they were tossing her, and I coming up the street yonder!"

"I could do nothing," replied Mr Gash.

"No, until this lady here shamed you," rejoined the other, crisply, "but an estated lady is other clay from a puir bit lassie with only the shawl ower her head. Auch, I know ye?"

"You must leave this place," said Heathcote to Irene, "Miss Phaire tells me that she is going to Rosbercon, you shall accompany her, it will give you breathing time until we make inquiries about Malplaquet. I have been seeking you all over the town."

The girl gave him a grateful look, and slipped her hand within his arm. "You were always unselfish, Ralph," she said, "it's just the same as in the old days, I recollect how you went back for the nosegay of daisies the time I fell into the stream, though you were all wet. Dear God, we did not know how happy we were!"

This deliberate reference to the pleasant past gave him a sudden joy which was instantly damped as he remembered the scene with Devereux the night before. "Can she love me, after all?" he thought. "Shall I put it to the test?"

"By the way, Major Heathcote," said Gash's suave voice, "I had nearly forgotten a commission which I was ordered to execute. I have the honour to be the bearer of this despatch—a flying seal, ha, ha, it should have been delivered immediately, but matters were so deranged here that I trust you will pardon the delay?"

Heathcote took the missive and glanced over the superscription, then he put it in his pocket. He half hoped it would prove a recall, and he determined if it should be one, to speak out. He looked at Gash's quiet face, and remembered its expression afterwards, and the fantastic thought to which it gave rise. Harrigan's choking cry—"Ask Phil Gash!" rang in his ear.

He looked at the man again, as the other sheathed his

sword, and took an instant dislike, one of those aversions not so much to the individual as to the principles of which he is the exponent.

He was conscious of a heavy pressure against his shoulder, and turning, caught Irene as she sank swooning at his side. He took her slowly in his arms, and accompanied by Gash, bore the exhausted girl as far as an hotel at the corner of South Street, where already Miss Prudence was being installed in a donkey cart. She received Irene with little cries of endearment, and unmindful of her own weakness, busied herself about the senseless form, weeping for pity the while.

"She is all that is left to me, Major Heathcote," she sobbed, "all, all gone—we were so happy—and now, there's not a roof over us! The bittern might call from our windows, and the fox seek a covert in our hall. Poor child, prophets would not have prophesied this thing of thee three little weeks ago!"

Heathcote did not regret his inability to remain, just then, but Mr Gash having done what he could to console her and restore the girl to consciousness, stayed to escort the car up Rosbercon hill.

On his way to the Market Place Heathcote met the general, who directed him to superintend the operations of a detail who were engaged looting houses near the Priory Gate under pretence of searching for rebels, and this duty was so arduous that it was only towards evening he had time to read his despatch. It contained a brief recall to England, with directions to wait on Mr Pitt who was contemplating a new movement; there was also a letter from Lord Carhampton releasing him from military duties, and bearing eloquent testimony to his abilities while in Ireland.

"Much he knows about it!" muttered Heathcote. "Well, it is a recall, God be praised! I am sick of those shambles."

He thought of Irene with a sudden thrill of hope and

relief. Yes, he was free now, and he would put all to the test. Instinctively he glanced at his tattered clothes, and forthwith made some efforts to repair the worst rents, and wash the powder black away, but the attempt was not very successful; he was forced to content himself with a cleaned face and freshly polished boots.

"Pshaw," he muttered, staring at his own reflection in the shattered glass, the sole mirror of the house where he made those alterations. "A man's a man, come what may, and if she cares for me the smell of powder won't turn her stomach. In boots I came egad, and in boots I'll go! Pish, I would there were less grey hairs here for a year or two," he went on, rearranging his somewhat unevenly cropped chevelure, "but we can't have our cake and eat it. 'Slife, she's a comely wench. Sweet lass, God knows I love thee!"

He was not able to leave as soon as he expected, and the evening shadows were again falling when he set out for Rosbercon, his head in a whirl, much as it had been when he marched to his first battle, the ineffable sweetness of the June evening falling like mystic dew upon his parched spirit.

"It will be like this in fifty years' time," he muttered, pausing to glance at the water flowing under the bridge. "Just the very same whether she say 'yes' or 'no.' But, the time between—the living! Shall Irene grow old too? How can she? 'Slife, these women are but flowers, aye, and made to be plucked—but if she says 'nay.'"

He was tempted for a moment to turn back, but grasping his sword-hilt, plodded on. At the very door of the cabin where he understood the ladies had found a temporary refuge, he thought again of returning, but it opened too soon, and it was with a peculiar thrill of relief that he learned she had left the place. A discussion resulted; several women, seeing the man's coat was scarlet, clustered round, eager to curry favour by effusive civility. One white-faced girl, almost inarticulate

through nervousness, stating that she heard the ladies went to Mr Rossiter's, but another suggested that it was to Inistiogue; a third recollected it was the elder lady gave the direction, but could not remember it. Then, the women all spoke together, and between his impatience and their eagerness it was long before he could comprehend. He found presently that they were only watching for some clue to his own wish in order to assent to it, and with a kindly nod he passed on, feeling sure that the ladies could not have gone by him on the road to the town, and late as the hour was, set out for Inistiogue, which he reached after many false turnings and many fruitless inquiries. But here again he was doomed to disappointment, though Miss Prudence was well known in the locality.

Having answered curtly a succession of foolish questions regarding the state of New Ross, he tramped back through the summer night.

At Rosbercon there were lights in a few houses, and he inquired again, the poor women whose countrymen's blood was still caking the streets of the town affecting to take a profound interest in the matter, and giving him many directions as to the locality of Mr Rossiter's house. He was going there when a belated trooper, who had been seeking him for some time, came up with orders to patrol the roads leading to Carrickbyrne, and he was obliged to obey immediately, for he did not care to dispute orders.

Next morning he encountered Mr Gash in the Market Place, and on his asking that gentleman for information, received a polite and comprehensive denial of any knowledge regarding the ladies' movements since he had parted with them at Rosbercon. He also, Heathcote thought afterwards, gave too accurate an account of his own. Watching the man's serene face the soldier felt again the impulse of aversion he had experienced the day before, and suddenly cutting the current of his phrases, he said—

"Do you happen to know anything about the theft of my papers?"

In spite of every effort, the spy paled.

"If you do," continued Heathcote, "and if you have them in your possession from whatever design, and from whatever motive, I warn you to restore them."

"Major Heathcote," replied Mr Gash, "since you came to this country your conduct has been on more than one occasion marked by a certain eccentricity of deportment which has caused comment, but it might have been expected that you would have refrained from deliberate insult. Amongst gentlemen there is only one way of settling such demands or answering such questions, it is a way you possibly have heard I am not averse from taking."

"Amongst gentlemen I know there is," rejoined Heathcote bitterly, "but you are no gentleman — a consorter with spies and deserters, a cheat and a thief."

"I have had some luck at cards," replied Mr Gash evenly, "and must suffer the sneers of those whom fortune does not favour in that or apparently any other particular; but as to the specific charge of theft——"

"I shall prove it!" answered Heathcote hotly, though he could not at the moment tell how.

"That will depend upon the stupidity of the jury and the strength of your purse," retorted Gash contemptuously.

Heathcote laughed. "In England there is such a thing as justice," he said, "Justice is not bought there like votes!"

"The reference might have been happier," observed Mr Gash tranquilly. "Do you happen to know an old gentleman named Walpole? I met him once, most entertaining man, he seems to be a good observer, and he holds a different opinion. So does one Wilkes— member for Sarum."

"Leaving these quibbles on one side," rejoined Heathcote, "this much I do know touching the pocket-book,

it was stolen, and I suspect you are the real thief. I have it on the statement of your accomplice Harrigan."

Mr Gash was not bronze, a look of discomposure, of hopeless surprise, struggled to his face.

"Truly you do well to put the word of this rascal against mine," he said weakly, "you will find your witness an awkward one, if he be the man I know."

Heathcote had no doubt now, but proof, proof. Gash saw the hesitation, and touched the hilt of his sword with his uninjured hand.

"I expect an explanation or an apology," he remarked crisply.

Heathcote gave him a long, evil look which might have daunted a braver man. As in his altercation with Matt in the stable, he found himself face to face with a force he could not understand, and dared not despise. Fitzgerald's words, the talk at Wexford — all came back. He set his lips firmly. Yes, after all the only way was to kill such curs, but, was he sure of being able to do it?

"I shall neither apologise nor fight," he said, "until I have settled this matter definitely, then, I assume you shall have your choice, if I be wrong."

"And in the meantime you will sustain the reputation of the Ninth Regiment of Dragoons in your own peculiar way," sneered Gash. "You will also have ample time for playing the knight-errant to Miss Neville."

Heathcote who had retired a few paces, paused at the words, and returned deliberately, his boot soles making deep impressions in the dust.

"I forbid you to use that lady's name again," he said imperiously, "or to frequent her society."

"If that be the lady's wish, it shall command my instant obedience," replied Gash, "but your right to make such a demand I question—if only from regard of the lady's good name——and I shall frequent Miss Neville's society as often as seems good to me, until your

right to assume the airs of a protector is put beyond cavil."

"I forbid you by the right an honest man has to defend a pure gentlewoman from the company of those whose social position is the least part of the disparity between them," said Heathcote calmly.

"The lady's own father was of a different opinion," answered Mr Gash gently. "As to your own position, you were presented to me as a major by him, and that is of course sufficient, but did I choose to question your rank, I fancy it would be easy; a major you may be, but, where is your commission? Not a soul here knows you."

In a moment Heathcote understood; he raised his hand, but seeing the other's bandaged arm, dropped it at his side. Gash stepped back and drew.

"Have a care, sir," said the soldier, his own sword was in his hand now, "if you provoke me further, I shall forget what is due to myself in all that is due to you——"

He barely stepped back in time, the other's sword point glinted past his throat for the fraction of a second.

With a fierce oath, Heathcote beat down the next lounge, and drove Gash back in turn, breaking through his guard with a blow that cut his face slightly, and thrusting with such lightning rapidity that the scarlet waistcoat of his foe was torn again and again under the ribs, while Gash springing now to this side, now to that, watched unwinkingly for a chance to rush in and end the fight. He had provoked the quarrel, not knowing how far Harrigan's admissions had damaged him, and also because he had grown to hate Heathcote for some time past, but, skilful a fencer as he was, he found ere two minutes had gone by that the angry man before him was his equal, and although he did succeed in forcing him backward, again in a fierce rally, wounding

him slightly on the shoulder, yet the duel might have terminated disastrously for him if a third sword had not struck up the snarling blades, and a stern voice cried—

"Shame, gentlemen! Quarrelling in the public street, like a pair of cudgel players! Ecod, Major Heathcote, I should not like to be your opponent. Ah, Mr Gash, I should have thought you had had enough of fighting, without trying to kill the regulars, just to keep your hand in—Well, I shall get something more profitable for you to do. But first go and get your face sewn, else it will widen into a most bloody-minded scar. Major Heathcote, a word with you."

He drew the soldier aside. "You reported to me that you were under orders for England last night," he said, "have you any objection to take a command as far as Carnew?"

"I have none, sir," replied Heathcote, "my orders are to return, but as no date has been mentioned, I presume I am free to travel at my reasonable convenience."

"Then I presume this will not clash with it," answered the veteran, a twinkle in his eye, "since you did not start last night—a lady in the case, eh?"

Heathcote thought instantly of referring to Irene and Miss Prudence, whose position would, he felt sure, command the general's sympathy, but the dread lest the interrupted quarrel might connect them with it in his mind, kept him silent.

"Well, well," pursued Johnson, "we shall have time enough for courting as well as adjusting our differences, when the croppies are beaten. Have you any baggage?"

"Naught but what I can carry on a crupper," rejoined the soldier laughing. "Some croppies are strutting in my wardrobe at Enniscorthy."

"Very well, then in half an hour," replied Johnson, "there is like to be some fierce fighting northward, and I have some despatches to send; report when all is ready."

It took more than the time mentioned to see the detail of troopers in marching order. Still, he snatched a moment to send a yeoman with an incautious crown to make enquiries at Rossiter's, but the man having got gloriously drunk in Bridge Street, returned with a minute and profane account of the number of corpses he had seen thrown over the parapet, and nothing more. So Heathcote was forced to content himself with the hope that before he left Ireland, or at least on his return to England, he would be able to open a correspondence and come to an understanding.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE route which he and his little detachment followed was somewhat circuitous, and led them past Inistiogue where Heathcote halted to make inquiries, having scanned the various cross roads on his way. Most of the latter were deserted, and all he could discern for miles upon the high one was a little cart such as country people use, an awning in front, a shabby thing under the sunlight, so it was with a heavy heart he rode slowly over the bridge spanning the whispering Nore, and without a thought for the sylvan beauty of that lovely place, took his way towards Thomastown.

A halt was called at Borris which had been ineffectually attacked in the preceding month, and he spent the night at the house of a Captain Kavanagh, descendant of a natural son of Mac Murrough, and now most appropriately ranged on the side of the stranger.

The magnificent mansion with its traditions of siege and state, circled by its noble woods and towering mountains, reminded him of the halls of England, and he longed for home as he sauntered through the great rooms, and stared listlessly at the antiquities they contained, relics of a civilization from the dim days ere Saxon foot touched British soil.

From Borris the march was uneventful, the country being of course deserted, save by small parties of yeomen who were engaged upon the congenial work of devastation, all victuals which they could not consume being ruthlessly destroyed, as the hungry troopers found. Pushing on, they reached Newtownbarry amid its rolling woods and soon leaving it behind, saw from afar the smoke of

burning cabins which marked Carnew where a detachment of insurgents from Kilcavan Hill were at length avenging on their Orange persecutors the infamies which had made that district one vast torture chamber.

Hearing that Loftus had retired to Tullow, Heathcote according to his instructions, advanced to Arklow, with many a wide detour, and although coming under a desultory fire once or twice, succeeded in piloting his little party to the town, having skirted the slopes of Crogan Kinsella and Cross Patrick for a weary day.

It had been his intention to proceed at once to Dublin, but General Needham, who had command of the place represented that experienced officers were wanted there, and requisitioned his services for the cavalry detachment, Heathcote readily assenting in the secret hope that some unexpected chance might bring Irene across his path again.

His post was not a sinecure; the confusion of Wexford was repeated, every half hour bringing a contingent despatched hot foot from Dublin in every conceivable kind of vehicle, most of them having never before travelled outside the North Circular Road. The night went by in strenuous preparation, Heathcote's news of the burning of Carnew urging the garrison to greater activity, and the place was rapidly put into a state of defence. A council of war was also held, and the determination to fight behind entrenchments come to, the cavalry to act on the reaches of sand outside the town.

Accordingly, barricades were hastily erected at vulnerable points, and the level ground at the entrance of the town defended by an entrenched line, Tyrones, Suffolks, Cavans and Durhams, the latter under a somewhat pragmatic Colonel Skerret and supplied with two battalion guns, supporting each other; the supplementary forces holding the churchyard, the street looking on the bridge defended by a gun, a banquette being also erected at the barrack wall.

Heathcote, who was by this familiar with the temper of the troops, urged strongly the plan of occupying entrenchments. "They are not fit to meet those men in the field," he said, some officers thought bluntly, "you must hold the rebels off till the gunsmen have exhausted their powder, for I can see they have not much of that; if the pikemen get at you, you will never see another day."

All preparations made, the soldiers stood at their arms as they had done at Enniscorthy, while little bodies of horse hovered along the roads by the river, across the plain in front, and on those leading to Gorey itself, the insurgent base.

The day wore away slowly, until the distant surge of the sea chopping through the stillness began to take the character of many feet, then the murmur of many voices, the voices of a host marching to battle across the hills. By degrees the sounds grew and swelled, though not towards the shore of the sea, but towards the right, and the Coolgreney road in front.

Presently a green banner with a golden harp upon it caught the sunlight above a hill facing the royal position, and even the most besotted yeoman fidgetting with his bridle rein knew that the issue was knit now, that death flew ever on such pinions once the patriots closed. On came the banners, first one, then another, and another —green and orange—flouting the breeze that blew from St George's Channel.

Slowly that menacing pageant went on, moving from left to right, but tardily and with much shouting, while the royal troops waited silently behind the barricades. At last the insurgent line was formed, an impressive spectacle, which caused the few officers who had cantered into the centre of the line to lower their voices as they talked among themselves, pointing and peering at that dense mass of men uncoiling before them until the hillsides were a semi-circle of steel, and in front—fit chord for such an arc—a long line of musketeers, most of them men of Shielmalier.

"It makes a brave show," said General Needham, "there are thousands and thousands of 'em."

"The better for us," rejoined Heathcote, adjusting his glass. "They rarely fight well in numbers, see how few of them have muskets, hardly a thousand I should say. Ah, they have guns too, and those fellows with 'em are the Royal Artillery. See how they drag 'em by hand over the ground. God! how they work! I shall never call the Irish lazy."

"Oh, the rascals work well enough when it is to destroy something," replied Cope, who happened to be present. "By the way, who is that directing them?" he added, pointing to a horseman clearing a way through an irregular formation six files deep in places.

"You mean the fellow with the green cockade?" answered Knox of the Coolgreneys, "that's Dick Monk, a hardy thief, see how he shakes his fist."

"No, no, the other, a gentleman I should say, seems to know something too—the one who carries his left arm so stiffly?" replied Heathcote.

"Oh, that's Esmond Kyan," said Knox, "he's lost an arm too. The father's a strong loyalist—but he is an open flaring Jacobite, they have a place near Oulart. He married a wife who did not please the old man, so they quarrelled. Pretty woman I am told. Aha, yonder is Perry, the damned traitor——"

"Aye, and Fitzgerald too," said Captain Beaumont of the Coolgreneys, "see, he is talking to the mass priest."

"Yes, Murphy of Ballycanoe — him with the flag," replied the other, "but their hero, Father John, is not here at all. By Gad, I think they mean to advance——"

The officers looked earnestly towards that arc of steel aflame with slanting sunbeams. Suddenly it wavered, and began slowly to move down the hill towards the other arc with its refused flanks protected by battalion guns.

The line of musketeers rapidly dashed forward and

occupied an irregular string of ditches parallel to the royal front, and opened fire, an officer falling forward with a short gasp, his horse galloping heavily towards the ranks upon the left. The spectators wheeling round, rode for their respective commands, while a sharp fire from the Durhams on the right, embarrassed but did not impede the men dragging their guns by the Coolgreney road, the advance being so rapid that yeomen cavalry which had been out reconnoitring were to be seen swimming their horses across the Ovoca as the dauntless peasants came on, white clouds heeling above the wisps of rifle smoke along the hedges, as the insurgent guns answered the King's cannon.

In a twinkling the action became general, the musketry smoke from the royal line banking up in opaque clouds, that of the insurgents showing gaps where men knelt under cover of the ditches cursing the fate which had put arms into their hands they could not use, some because of sheer ignorance, others for want of a flint, a hammer, or even a ram-rod, so utterly unequipped was the peasant army with skilled workmen who could repair or refit their slender stock of fire-arms. But if the insurgent fire was not very regular, it was quite as deadly as the royal fusilade, the sportsmen of the Slaney side sending bullet after bullet to its red-coated mark with terrible precision. The cannon too thundered continually, being served by Maxwell's gunners, who of course elevated the muzzles and loaded with grape, firing also as rapidly as possible, in order to waste the powder, until one of them, a man named Shepherd, by cunningly deflecting the fire of his piece, swept away a score of eager pikemen, and would have been shot by Monk if Kyan had not interposed. He was himself sighting the gun when a message demanded his presence in another part of the field, and Shepherd recommenced his former tactics, until the insurgent leader, returning, dashed him aside, and manning the piece with some ignorant but determined peasants, opened fire in

deadly earnest, so that ere long he had dismounted one of Skerret's cannon.

At this moment a detachment of pikemen, headed by a young officer named Redmond, the noble son of a heroic father, making a sudden dash, sped across the fields straight at the foe blinded by his own smoke. There was a quick rally, a hail of lead and a shivering strain along the lines as the desperate charge foamed on the levelled bayonets, the soldier, who led it so dauntlessly, falling in the forefront of the rush.

But now a terrific yell thundered on the left, and the smoke of straw showed the insurgents were attacking the Fishery, as the lower part of the pretty little town is called, the yeomen and cavalry giving ground, the latter repulsed again and again, although their charges on the sands and in the streets told heavily upon the patriot advance.

The centre of the royal line was quivering too before the shock of onset, an attack being made on the barricade under cover of a hot fire from the ditches and the deadly cannonade so well directed by Kyan, who was anxiously noting the results of the deliberate waste of powder, now so badly needed. It was repulsed, but was succeeded by another, and the gasping Dumbartons, staggering like unskilful bathers stunned by the breathless succession of long Atlantic rollers, began to look over their shoulders, muttering that it was thus at Tubberneering. Still they fought on as they fought on that narrow road by Clough, but Kyan's guns were being pushed nearer, and men fell rapidly under their showers of shearing grape or smashing ball, the spectacle of one soldier with his stomach torn away, writhing on the ground, one mass of scarlet agony, standing out for many a day upon the memories of those who saw and shuddered.

The Fishery was occupied, and presently a mad struggle was being waged around the barricade protecting the bridge across the Ovoca, the sole means of retreat

towards Wicklow, the Antrims fighting gallantly, then desperately, their gun stinging the insurgents back again and again as those tireless ranks broke and reformed, and charged, and broke and charged once more.

The cavalry fought well, driving home each rush boot to boot, and more than once hurling the Irish column back even upon the main body which had not yet participated in the strife, their unwieldy numbers still preserving the appearance of a crescent, their rude scythes bound on the ends of ash poles, reddened as yet only by the sun sinking behind Crogan Kinsella.

"Hot work!" shouted Wynne of the Ancient Britons, as he galloped back from one of those charges. "Luckily those oafs yonder are holding off, gaping at their artillery. God's curse on it! If they come on to the shock it will be Tubberneering all over again; they'll smother us by G—d, and that bridge will be choked. Hark! What cheering is that?"

He might well ask, paling as he spoke. Skerret's stubborn soldiery had at length been dislodged, and fallen back behind some fences, where they, however, entrenched themselves afresh; horsemen were seen riding towards the hillsides.

"That means a general advance!" cried Heathcote; "no matter, let's beat the foremost off; while there's life there's hope. Ho! Form there clear of the broken ground, and prepare to charge."

A hoarse rolling cheer surged downward from the semi-circle of pikemen opposite, the banners dipped and rose and quivered, the good steel flashing at a thousand angles, a rippling wave of light. A crucial moment was at hand.

"Is that all we have?" asked Edmund Kyan, pointing to the few remaining rounds of ammunition.

"Not another shot, by heaven," answered Monk, "the keg we got from Wexford is used, the rest was wasted by that slinking hound!"

"Then, it rests with the pikemen now," said Kyan. "Oh God!"

He staggered back, a ball from one of the Durham guns tearing away his left arm, the mangled stump gushing blood, as his comrade ran to bind the severed artery, a fierce yell rising as it had risen when young Redmond fell. A moment later the wounded man recovered himself.

"My loose timbers are flying, God save the mark!" he cried gaily, "but it is only my left, and most of it wood. Now for the right arm of the British line!" and sighting the piece, he sent an iron hail of death once more upon the foe.

Of such stuff were the men of Ninety-Eight.

Again he loaded and again he fired, though suffering bitterly, and the roar of battle dominated the thunder of the guns, the climax of the hard fought fight was approaching.

An officer, no other than Captain Bird of Carnew, rushed through the yeomen and regulars drawing nearer and nearer to the houses flanking the long street that bisects the little town, and hurried to Skerret's force aiming and firing behind their new position with stubborn tenacity.

"General Needham's orders, sir," he cried, "fall back to the street, the enemy——"

"I shall not, sir," answered Skerret, clapping his hat fiercely down upon his head. "I have fallen back quite enough already. We'll beat 'em off if we only stand together, the more we move the more they'll keep us so. There is already a temperament in their firing, and while we hold this position they cannot dislodge us."

"But the yeomanry are already in retreat," objected Bird, "and the rebels are in the Fishery."

"What the devil is that to me?" cried Skerret irritably. "It's nothing new for the yeomen to be in retreat, I conceive— Ah, are you hit?"

There was no answer; Bird spun round and fell, a bullet in his brain, and soon after a dozen soldiers in the Colonel's vicinity fell shrieking under the last discharge of Kyan's cannon.

The smoke was thick along the crumpled wavering English line now, and through rifts in it the soldiers could see the insurgent columns, beaded here and there by rifle puffs, approaching. The Irish cannon, however, was silent, the powder had failed, but the men of the pike had not, and heavy masses trod on towards the Fishery already half won, while a terrific charge, led by Father Murphy of Ballycanoe, a banner in one hand, his sword in the other, swept down upon Skerret's Durhams and Dumbartons, dashing into the trenches or thronging about the guns, Kyan cheering them on with the little voice left him, as he was borne from the field when he had won the painful glory which sweetens mortal names against the breath of Time.

"Damnation! It's hell let loose!" cried Wynne. "Well, Major, can you keep 'em off a bit?"

"Not long," shouted Heathcote, as he rode behind a diminished group of cavalry he had led upon a rude square staggering into formation some distance away, "they have caught the trick of meeting horse. That churchyard detachment ought keep up a better fire?"

"There are none in the churchyard now save the usual population of that silent borough, considerably increased," laughed Wynne. "How Skerret's guns are going! He'll be the death of us; why does he not limber up and retreat? He'll be surrounded; they are now on the Ovoca road I hear."

"His men are fresh," answered Heathcote. "I mean the Cavans and Durhams; they came hither on carts, and are well placed. Ecod, he may be the salvation of us if he holds his own."

At the barricade the fighting was hand to hand in several places, and towards a gun being slowly pointed

Father Murphy, who was first here, led the charge, a proud sight for Irish eyes, a memory for Irish hearts. Then the gun screamed, and the valiant spirit leaped back to the God of Liberty.

For an instant his death passed unnoted, and the barricade was won; but the Durhams, though falling back, preserved even in that awful moment some appearance of order, and poured a deadly volley upon the victors, who halted as their comrades coming up behind beheld the mangled body of the patriot priest, the flag with its motto, "Liberty or Death," soaking the blood so nobly shed for Ireland.

There was a pause of fatal irresolution, the gasping Dumbartons were rallying, and the cavalry again bore furiously down upon the brave but undisciplined masses; Heathcote, who was already wounded, coming to earth in the press, his dying horse kicking him as he hacked at the terrible pikes; and when he recovered consciousness he recognised that his effective part in the battle was played. So, staggering to his feet, with a broken arm and a swimming head, he reeled to a charger he saw with difficulty through the blood veiling his eyes, scrambled into the saddle, and, groaning heavily, rode stiffly back into the town, passing a small lot of insurgents who let him go with a laugh, but in his dulled ears the Durham guns were roaring still.

The scene on the bridge was one of utter confusion and dismay, little squads of yeomanry stumbling on one another's heels along the road to distant Wicklow. To Heathcote the air was full of confused voices—the screaming of the sea-birds overhead, then a hand, from a cloud it seemed, arrested his horse, and a surgeon, seeing that he was an officer of consequence, had him put into a "noddy," which bore him out from Arklow under a very willing escort, who found no difficulty in keeping up with the half-broken country mare between the shafts.

The summer evening was now closing softly around

the furious roar of the battle which had endured three hours, driblets of soldiery creeping away on foot, or swimming the Ovoca; but, seeing that Skerret held his ground, Needham lingered on, and was about to despatch a peremptory order to retire, when a man on a powerful black horse thundered past barricades and infantry, shouting, "Hold your ground, they are broken!" It was Harrigan.

"What do you mean, sir?" shouted Needham.

"What I say," laughed the other, "a damned unusual thing too. They have no ammunition, and they are as ignorant as dirt; they are going back, not retreating mind you, but going away to fight you to-morrow, bimby you know. These blockheads yonder have saved the town. Nay, it's truth I'm telling you! Their best men are down; I passed Kyan myself a short time agone, on the road to Wexford, and as the patriots have been always looking into other people's faces for a clue to everything under the sun, they don't know that they are victors till they are told—you'll not do that I take it!"

Needham laughed. "Well, sir, Colonel Skerret's men don't know that they are beaten, so they are quits," he said.

Harrigan laughed too and snapped his fingers. "Call up all you have here, and get your cavalry out again," he cried. "I tell you that although you are beaten the battle is yours."

"Bid Major Heathcote advance," cried the general.

"I fear Major Heathcote is killed, sir," replied Wynne, who had joined the group.

"Hah, then we have lost a brave officer," replied Needham; "it's a pity, for he was under recall too. Well, such is the luck of war. Where is Captain Bird?"

"I have just heard that he was shot," answered another officer. "Colonel Skerret reports that there seems to be a movement to retire."

"Good!" cried Needham. "Well, come forward a little. Hold your ground, lads, the tide is turning!"

Preceded by Harrigan, Needham and his staff cantered forward, and saw to the right the smoke plumed fences that marked Skerret's position, and across the corpse-strewn plain heavy bodies of men could also be descried moving slowly towards the Gorey road in strange silence. They were not going fast, and they halted several times to take up the wounded here and there in a most leisurely fashion. As on many other occasions, their childish ignorance had been the salvation of their foe.

They were not pursued, the failing light being the reason alleged, and its cogency will be apparent to those who reflect a moment on the Egyptian darkness which characterises eight of the clock on summer evenings on the east coast of Ireland.

Mountnorris of the Camolins looking on the field found Father Murphy's body, and ordered the head to be struck off and the corpse thrown into a fire, saying with more than Popish omniscience: "Let the carcass go where the soul has gone!" But Wynne's Ancient Britons did better; they tore out the great heart, and roasted it at the camp fire, with many arch pleasantries. But while the patriot heart was blazing fiercely amid the jeers of the Welsh brutes, Harrigan was riding through the twilight along the narrow highway leading up from Arklow even to Rathnew where it joins the greater to Bray, and so on to Dublin, with the welcome news of victory in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXX

AMONGST the many rascals who were welcomed at the Castle in those times, there was not one who received a more cordial greeting than Steve Harrigan as he handed in his fateful message on the next morning. He was bidden to call in the course of the day, and then wearied out, he retired to the "Stag House" where he obtained liberal refreshment and sorely needed sleep. Then while the noon was yet young, he betook himself to a tailor's shop, whence he emerged better clad than he had been for many days, and after a visit to a boot-maker and other human upholsterers, appeared in College Green, a cane dangling from his wrist, a snuff box in his hand, his brilliantly lacquered "hessians" catching the light at every step, his head erect, and nodding at intervals to some distant acquaintances; a very fair rendering of the buck of the period.

Having taken one or two turns here, and used his quizzing glass with admirable and most modish impudence on every pretty woman who crossed his path, he hired a vehicle, and made the tour of the North Circular Road, the red eyes observing every detail of the fashionable throng of rogues and demi-reps who grinned and flaunted their little hour in the sunlight. Having thus taken the air, he was driven to the address from which Nellie Bird's letter had been written, and ere long found himself in that lady's presence.

"Mr Harrigan?" said she, when he had introduced himself, "I do not recollect having met you before; to what do I owe the honour of this visit?"

"To the exigencies of business, the fortune of war,

and that natural, not to say laudable curiosity which impelled our father Adam to make certain experiments," replied the other.

Nellie stole a glance at herself in a little oblong mirror divided into compartments by Pan-crowned termini, and rearranged a tress.

"Let it alone, my jewel," observed Harrigan quietly. "I read once of a decent man who was made to say that he would not resign one lock of a girl's hair for the wealth of Arabian Kings; I thought him a fool then, but upon my conscience, I reverse my judgment now."

Nellie looked at him, she had expected to meet a rough rascal, instead, she was confronted by an assured, well dressed one—all the difference in the world. She made a graceful curtsy.

"You are pleased to be oracular, sir," she said demurely. "And I fear your commerce with court ladies may have led you to overrate the intellectual powers of the sex. I am only a poor country girl."

"An Amaryllis of Trianon," smiled Harrigan, "but I understand from our pastoral poets that they can be oracular too in Arcadia?"

"That is the privilege of poets, sir," rejoined Miss Bird. "But, when one talks prose the necessity for being obscure is not so apparent."

"I shall be content if you think me only that for intruding on you," replied Harrigan humbly, "but my excuse is the interest you have displayed in my fortunes, an interest which has emboldened me to see for myself, and I find that the reality has exceeded the description," he continued, taking a chair to which he had not been invited. "May I ask you to be seated?"

Nellie Bird glanced at him curiously. She did not find eye or mouth repulsive, but she wondered how old he was, and decided that Thorncroft was what a woman hates most, a babbler.

"I made the inquiry to which you allude solely at the

request of a member of the Government, who I understand has some business in hand for you to transact," she replied. "You have served the State before?"

"Aye, as the black fellow says in the play, I have done the State some service, and they know it—and other things," rejoined Harrigan, "but never before have my duties led me into such pleasant places."

Nellie Bird looked at him again. He was quite earnest when he paid her the florid compliment which opened the conversation, and his genuine admiration was reflected in his eyes.

"You do not lose time, sir," replied the girl lowering her glance; "you are a perfect model of duty apparently."

"A slave," answered Harrigan, "when it and inclination point the same way."

There was a slight pause; he caught her eye again, she lowered it.

"Mr Thorncroft is well, I hope?" she remarked, rearranging a fold.

"As well as he deserves to be, I daresay," replied Harrigan lightly, "but it was not from him I learned to know of you, it was from one Philip Gash, and I find that the colours of the picture are not charged."

A lightning flash passed over Nellie's face, the watchful eyes opposite read its import.

"Mr Gash is very clever with his tongue," she said.

"And he can tell the truth sometimes, though I never thought it until now," answered Harrigan. "He is a friend of yours."

"No friend of mine!" said Nellie.

Harrigan looked at her fixedly. "He certainly does seem prejudiced against you," he observed slowly, "possibly for reasons of his own."

Nellie Bird laughed, the implied compliment pleased her. "Mr Gash would be a far more successful man if he were not quite so clever," she said; "he forgets that others can be sharp too."

"Quite true," agreed Harrigan. "Cleverness is very often a drawback; an ounce of opportune stupidity is worth a bushel of it."

"If that were true of stupidity," replied Nellie disdainfully, "all our Irish commanders would be field-marshals."

"Nevertheless, I have had an example of lucky stupidity yesterday at Arklow," replied Harrigan. And with easy phrases he sketched the action, most of which he had seen from the hills behind the pikemen, who, had they known of his presence, would assuredly have saved him the trouble of riding further.

She listened intently, watching the strenuous face and wondering who he was and what his position.

"Arklow!" she cried, "it is a terrible place; I was once there for a while, thanks to the courtesy of Mr Gash. Did you hear of a Captain Bird?"

Harrigan grew suddenly grave and gave her a look in which astonishment and regret were skilfully blended.

"His command was stationed about that very place," she went on. "Why do you not answer? Was he killed?"

Harrigan bowed, and looked out pathetically on a chimney pot.

"Oh, well, if he was, I daresay he was no great loss," observed the lady, shrugging her shoulders.

This, odd as it may seem to ordinary people, was decidedly the truest sentiment to which she had given expression during the interview, the deceased Bird having in addition to the vices which characterise his class, a leaning towards motiveless cruelty, and having acquired early in married life the chivalrous habit of beating his wife, through prudential motives, had on her death extended the same attentions to her daughter, through what he was pleased to regard as conscientious ones, frequently exercising himself by chasing her round the stable-yard with a rake handle, a pot-stick, or sword-scabbard, as occasion offered.

"By the way, let us talk about Mr Gash," she continued, "where is he now?"

"At New Ross," replied Harrigan, "and likely to remain there too."

Miss Bird looked at her companion, who returned the look.

"You seem interested in him?" he said.

"Lord Castlereagh is—in his movements," she answered. "Apropos of Castlereagh, did you receive your share for the Lord Edward business?"

Harrigan checked the oath on his lips. "That is a state matter," he said, a warning light in his eye.

"Pshaw," retorted Nellie Bird. "I am not a Jacobite spy." Then she added after a pause. "I should advise you to say that you have been paid only two hundred pounds, don't forget the 'only.' It will mean money in your pocket, Mr Harrigan."

"A thousand thanks," replied the other, with a slightly puzzled smile, "but as a matter of fact, the slippery cur choused me out of my share—owing to a circumstance."

"I see," said Nellie Bird, "he knows something about you?"

Harrigan looked at her again, respect had begun to temper the blazing admiration for the gracious little lady with the exquisite figure and the pink cheeks that never blushed. He began to laugh, but it was the laugh of the "Stag House"; she noticed that his clothes were very new.

"When a man gets to my time of life," he replied, "one or two people know one or two things about him, and whether they are creditable or the reverse depends very much upon his chances."

"I daresay Mr Gash himself is not a Simon Pure," she said, laughing. She felt drawn to the dark eager face, partly because the owner admired her so openly, possibly because he appeared to be a gentleman, or could be made to resemble one if sufficient motive power were applied,

and principally because he was no friend of Gash. He on his part watched her closely, her beauty attracted him still, and the surface refinement which was portion of that beauty, but he began to wish that the conversation had not taken so personal a turn.

"I feel as I once felt at a masked ball," he said, abruptly. "I met a pretty woman there, and enjoyed her society. We made an assignation, but she never came, and whether she was a princess or a flower-girl I never knew."

"A princess possibly," rejoined Nellie Bird. "In those countries the priests look after the morals of the flower-girls too well."

Harrigan darted another look at her. "Well," he said impatiently, "so I feel now. Are you a princess or a flower-girl? Do you know anything of the ropes? Are you a gamester or only an on-looker, piecing this and that together? Unmask, I pray you!"

Nellie Bird laughed delightedly. She was very much interested indeed; the man had other merits besides bringing her the news of her father's death.

"Why should I?" she said. "Is not life itself a masked ball, where some of us dance in rags, and some in purple, and all in chains? Who are you? Why do you come here?"

"I am," said Harrigan, "a man who might with extreme difficulty be a little better, and with all the ease in the world an atom worse."

Again Nellie Bird smiled, the feminine passion for playing at Providence was waking in her.

"You are humble," she said softly.

"Once upon a time, when I believed in a thousand things," said Harrigan, "I was a member of a religious house, and a gentleman came there to join the Order, I think as lay-brother. He did not suit, and going away he said to our sacristan, 'I have at least learned one thing here—humility.' Now that was the very virtue

for whose conspicuous want he was being dismissed. Ha! ha!"

Nellie Bird laughed pleasantly. "I am a bad judge of humility," she observed, "it is enough for me to remember that I was born in Ireland!"

"And to others that same circumstance is a source of exactly the opposite emotion," rejoined Harrigan—

> "A different cause, quoth Parson Sly,
> The same effect may give."

"You ought to go into our Parliament, Mr Harrigan," said Nellie Bird, with a girlish laugh, "that is the place for confusion of thought and accuracy of quotation."

"Ecod, you're right," replied Harrigan, nodding his head slowly, "I owe you one for that, you have the *esprit de salon*."

"And you," said Nellie Bird, with the slightest tinge of mockery in her laugh, "have, I am sure, the *esprit de suite*—so you will tell me why you came?"

"To see you."

"And yet, you would have me unmask?"

"Nay," replied Harrigan, drawing a long sigh, "if the mask pleases you, wear't to the end, my pretty dame—it would be hard for the reality to surpass it."

Nellie Bird lifted her eye-brows slightly. There was another pause, the two keen faces questioned each other steadily. Then Harrigan rose and crossing the room, deliberately sat himself down by her side.

"Miss Bird," he said quietly, "I am a man of strong passions—stronger will. When I knew you were making inquiries about me I inquired about you, and when I saw you just now, I knew my time was come. I might be younger, and I might be richer, but, take me as I am and you shall never regret it. I have loved wine and women all my life, and it is too late to turn tail on 'em now, but I pledge you my word I'll limit my glasses henceforth—I cannot say as much for my desires," he added in a lower

tone, "but, as they will be all your own, you can regulate them as you please."

Miss Bird smiled, but did not answer. Harrigan took from his pocket a large leathern bag, and extracted several rolls of brown paper, and tightly twisted cylinders, evidently bank notes.

"Each of these contains ten guineas," he said, holding a few before her eyes from which she could not keep the sparkle. "There are ten of 'em in each cartridge—and cartridges they are too—the deadliest and the best I know of, for they never miss fire. Mr Pitt's powder, my lady, and the best to use in Ireland for shooting Treason."

Laughing he emptied the bag and arranged the piles in mimic array before her on the table. "There are," he said, "one way and another, one thousand pounds there, and I want you to count it up."

She looked at him steadily.

"Now, what I have to say is this," he went on, his head to one side. "Have me, and I shall put it with the exception of a few pounds for present necessities, into Beresford's Bank in your name, Miss Bird. Refuse me, and it goes to the *bona robas* of Hamburg and Paris."

The mean beautiful face was lifted to his, the greedy eyes were weighing his past and future in one bright glance. She put out her hand, he caught it, but with an airy gesture that sent the lace slipping back along the length of the polished arm, she held him off, her eyes, however, were eloquent, and Harrigan who had lived all his life with women of her kind though he knew it not, read their import.

"Strike me blind," he murmured, "you are the loveliest dame I ever laid skin to! Nay, do not shake your head, by heaven, 'tis no flattery but the truth that's wrung out of me—You might make a jackal turn lion, a night-hawk tower to an eagle's flight!"

"A night-hawk?" she said with exquisitely modulated tones, and she pressed his hand. "A jackal? And pray, sir, for what lion is the prey marked down?"

Harrigan laughed. "Well put," he said, endeavouring to slip his arm round her waist. "A night-hawk I have been, my charmer, like many another decent man, aye, and played the part of the jackal too, and the lion, if you want to know, was Mr Gash—at any rate, he had the lion's share."

"What put you in his power?" she whispered, and the mouth barely reached his ear.

He hesitated, the evil look with which he had directed Gash's attention to the man under slow torture on Vinegar Hill shone in his eye.

"A rope is made out of flax soft as a woman's hair, he said, "and the first strands are spun by a woman's fingers."

"Go on," she said with the first frank look she had given him, and releasing his hand, she began composedly to unwrap and count a pile of the gold.

Harrigan watched the profile a moment, his brows contracted, the fingers of the right hand drumming on the table.

"Ten, twenty, thirty," counted Miss Bird, "and one over. How wonderfully like one another guineas are, I wonder how they make 'em so! God's life, it must be fine to be in the Mint! Forty, fifty—pish, here are two quarters; oh, and here's a Carolus. Bah, I hate him, he died a Papist—'twas one of us went with Monk to bring him over the sea. That's how we kept our land by Carnew, and fooled the Papish oafs who fought for him and expected he'd remember it! Well, Mr Harrigan, and is it thus you woo the dames of Paris? Fie, two heads are better than one. *De marchand et marchand il n' y a que la main.*"

Harrigan made up his mind. "Mr Gash happened to see me taking a pistol shot at a rogue from behind a fence," he said, "the cur refused to give me satisfaction in the field."

"Ifecks," said Nellie, with a lightning suggestion of

the brogue, "that's the best argument I ever heard for the duello, see now, if the gentleman let himself be killed in fair fight he wouldn't have run the risk of being murdered? Was he a man of position?" she added, shrugging her shoulders.

"He was one Colonel Luttrell," replied Harrigan.

She clapped her hands and turned to him with a laugh which might indeed have been an echo from some lost Arcadia, so artless, so spontaneous its trilling music. "How good!" she cried, "a stage play! And Gash is one of the Luttrels. Did you know that?"

Harrigan nodded, and made a gesture with his right hand over his left shoulder. "I heard some talk of it," he said. "He was always boasting about some duchess —the Duchess of Cumberland."

Nellie Bird smiled. "Aye, but they are out of favour," she cried, dropping a guinea. "The King is death on that marriage, and what is worse, she has not the wit to make common cause with the Duchess of Gloucester, Walpole's niece. Of course you know?"

"I have heard about 'em," said Harrigan, a little awkwardly. It was very human that he should have felt a momentary embarrassment in not being able to discuss the question with her. The flippant allusion to the great remote court ladies gave her a new charm in his eyes. "Gash was right," he thought, "she is a lady."

She was not slow to see this, though she had not once looked at him, therefore she began immediately to chat about the King and the intimacy of the Prince with the Cumberland set, and His Majesty's objection to it, light tittle-tattle of courts, which presently ranged from the King's illness to the latest development of a scandal concerning "Gunilda," hapless daughter of the absurd house of Gunning.

"Well, well, you missed," she said at last, and since you were seen, that is a comfort, but I daresay the man is used to being fired at by this, he has a talent for

making enemies; I never thought much of him as a soldier."

"He was colonel of a regiment to which I belonged," replied Harrigan, seeing that she was leading him on, but fiercely reckless now. "He insulted me, I challenged him; his servants beat me like a slave. I swore to take a shot at him when I got the chance. I did so, and would have shot him like a dog. I am a bad enemy, *carissima!*"

She did not doubt it, the red blaze in the flashing eye needed no interpretation.

"Still, it is very awkward," she said, pensively, "the man is powerful enough here, but I think we can checkmate Mr Gash for all that."

"Oh, but Castlereagh is a powerful friend too," said Harrigan.

"Is he?" replied Nellie, "shall I tell you a little story?" She looked over her shoulder, a light of amusement dancing in her eyes, and put a hand upon her lips. Harrigan looked at her admiringly.

"Pshaw, why not?" she added a moment later, "it will be of use to you." And she related the scene between Gash and Castlereagh, Harrigan hanging on every word, and softly applauding every point the narrator made; but when he had heard how Gash had gone off with the money in his pocket, he dropped the restraint of courtesy, and laughed the loud tavern laugh, which made Nellie Bird glance at him curiously, as he gently rocked to and fro in perfectly artistic appreciation of successful knavery.

"Castlereagh cannot touch him," he gasped, wiping his eyes with his coat-sleeve, "but he'll bear malice, and that is one for us, eh? It's providential?"

Nellie Bird nodded. "You have learned a valuable lesson of life, Mr Harrigan," she said, "the follies of our friends do show the existence of a providence—in that they put 'em in our power. It was very foolish, unless indeed he means to leave the country."

"Aha, I hardly think he intends to do that yet," replied Harrigan, slyly. "Have you heard of Neville's daughter? She's turned his head!"

"Oho, is that so?" cried Nellie, recollecting the by-play on the Arklow road, "I thought it was the brown girl—Fanny Gore. He had better take care, if he wins *her* it must be with loaded dice, and that will be nothing new, I fancy. I know her well, a statuesque coquette, full of sensibility as an egg's of meat! I thought the soldier dragoon, Heathcote, was the man there?"

Harrigan laughed. "He got his quietus at Arklow yesterday," he said.

"I'm glad of it," cried Nellie Bird, "he was cursed rude to poor Sam. Though now I'm sorry," she added, "because he would have been a good enemy for Gash; he has reason to be I know."

"Anything about a pocket-book?" remarked Harrigan, demurely.

"Aye," said Nellie, "but that is another story. I'll tell you some other time. You see I know something."

"Machiavelli was a fool to you," remarked Harrigan, taking a pinch of snuff and controlling his face. "Gash is done with the Castle set at any rate!"

"Ah, that is just what he is not," replied Nellie Bird, lifting a forefinger. "If he means to marry and settle down in the country they will watch well and repay sometime."

"Pshaw, I shall not be one of the watchers," remarked Harrigan.

"Indeed!" cried Miss Bird. "You were marked for that office."

"Let Thorncroft do it," retorted the other, smiling in spite of himself. "Frankly, I should prefer higher sport, now that I am likely to be someone—will you allow me to say for your sake? They were cursed civil at the Castle this morning when I brought the news of Arklow. I can speak French and Spanish tolerably, and fancy I can do more

for the state in Hamburg than in Wexford, with infinitely more convenience to myself. Ha! ha!"

Nellie laughed too. "Wexford is too hot?" she said, "well, that can be settled. Ah, what do you mean by coming into the room without knocking?" she continued, rising, while Harrigan swept the money on the table into the pouch, and a girl upon whose face a look of fatuous cunning was overlying its natural innocence, stood at the door, a letter in her hand.

"Pardon me a moment," said Nellie Bird, "she is quite raw, but useful. You can go," she continued, addressing the girl who had been staring at Harrigan with an expression of terror as he gathered up the money.

"From the Castle," she said after a pause, "and about a personal matter. It comes quite pat. Well, Mr Harrigan, if you have been frank with me you shall not have cause to regret it. I am going to see Lord Castlereagh at once; call a carriage and you shall accompany me, they will not object to see the gentleman who brought the news of our victory at Arklow. Recollect, you must say something about poor father's bravery, and we shall find whether your little *contretemps* cannot be smoothed over. If you would care to go abroad, I daresay we can find employment for you."

"But, will you marry me?" asked Harrigan, pulling the string of the purse tight, "that is the long and short of it?"

"You are very *exigeant*, sir, on so short an acquaintance," she replied, fanning herself with the paper. "Do maids surrender so lightly in those foreign cities? Is that fortress of virtue, a woman's heart, so easily taken?"

"A woman's heart," replied Harrigan, "is a fortress that can be opened with a golden key everywhere, only unfortunately, it is a master one and will turn in any hand."

"Nay, sir, give me leave to differ from you," replied the girl with a pretty affectation of sentiment, "a woman's heart has never been opened by the same key twice—it opens only once, thenceforward it is on the latch."

Harrigan slipped his arm around her now, and caught her chin in his hand. "Come, speak out," he said softly. "Wilt marry me, and choose your own time?"

Nellie Bird laughed, her face was close to his, she did not answer, and he kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER XXXI

ARKLOW, the last great battle of this peasant war, was lost through sheer inability to profit by success, but the struggle was not over yet as Dundas and Loftus in Wicklow, and Lake sheltered behind entrenchments at Gorey, learned to their cost. However, a movement towards Vinegar Hill was soon organized, and the Government, now fully alive to the quality of the men whom they had provoked, drafted regiment after regiment into that single county of Wexford, until the handful of patriots found themselves being gradually hemmed in by a force of ninety thousand men ringing them round from the mountains to the sea.

In the south Father Philip Roche's army still besieged New Ross, harassing the gun-boats on the Barrow at intervals, but were at length obliged to evacuate their various positions owing to the failure of an attack upon Borris House where they had hoped to find sufficient powder to risk a fresh assault, their retreat being hastened too by the approach of General Moore's force of twelve hundred men, but the battle of Fook's Mill showed how dangerous it was to pursue them too closely.

Meanwhile, the English generals commanding the various divisions pushed nearer to Vinegar Hill, their track marked by mutilated corpses, the Gorey swine waxing fat on the flesh of slaughtered women. Again the Duffrey Gate was stormed, and taken only when Barker of Enniscorthy had lost an arm, and Father Kearns had been removed severely wounded. Once more the town was given up to flame and rapine, once more the horror of New Ross repeated, the hospital being burned with its hapless inmates.

In justice to the troops, it should be stated that this circumstance, like many others, was strenuously denied, the building having caught fire, "accidentally," from the straw mattresses which had been unavoidably ignited by Lake's gallant fellows who were merely shooting the patients in their beds. The ingenuousness of this distinction, so worthy of a literal and property-respecting people, will, it is to be hoped, have due weight with posterity.

The history of the pitiful time contains few narratives more pitiful than that of the battle on Vinegar Hill with its formidable cannon which were silent after their two rounds had been fired. We read how twenty thousand well-armed men attacked it and were opposed by an undisciplined multitude, two thousand of whom had muskets of some sort, the rest relying only on the pike or scythe, and how when their scanty cartridges were exhausted, the musketeers stood a withering fire of shot and shell, cheered on by the women clustering thickly behind, eager for death, while the pikemen made charge after charge upon the English infantry, who despite their numbers, entrenched themselves behind the fences at the base, and did not dare the shock of steel, the rushes of the royal horse being beaten off again and again, the insurgents finally retiring under cover of Father Edward Roche's division. Yes, General Lake, "The rascals made a tolerable good fight of it."

Two days later Wexford fell, while yet the blood of its victims was fresh upon the famous bridge where the tortured peasants revenged themselves in terrible, but most inadequate fashion, on the few Orangemen and informers who had fallen into their hands. The reign of Terror which had been merely interrupted by the outbreak, began again. Kelly of Killan, wounded and suffering, was dragged to death, his head being kicked to and fro before his sister's door ere it was spiked on the Custom House beside that of Father Roche, so foully

slain, and Captain Keough's, soon to be joined by Harvey's and Colcough's and that of many another who dared the desperate fight for Ireland.

But though defeated, the ill-armed peasants were not subdued, and although they had not then, nor ever once during the whole course of the Insurrection, sufficient powder to warrant a general officer in risking one engagement, they held to the losing fight with a grim determination which might be a lesson to men of other times and other methods.

Though Wexford was flooded with ninety thousand soldiers, two divisions of the wrecked army traversed it. One commanded by "Father John" in person, marching into broken-backed Kilkenny and Carlow and beating the royal forces blocking the way at Gore's Bridge, and infamous Castlecomer, until they won by the steel the Pass of Scollagh Gap, when they saw him no more. The other advanced from Wexford town up to Gorey, where the barbarities of the Orange cowards and foreign mercenaries were fiercely avenged by the slaughter of "Bloody Friday." A little later at Ballyellis they encountered the Ancient Britons, and exterminated the scarlet savages, hurling aside once more their Orange persecutors at Ballyrakeen Hill.

Aylmer in gallant Kildare too kept the green flag flying in the face of hopeless odds, moving from point to point with a celerity which baffled the incapables who then wore the epaulets of English generals in Ireland; amid the Wicklow glens Michael Dwyer, enthusiast and patriot, and Holt, a better type, held the British soldiery at bay long after the last shot of a pitched battle had been fired, giving the eagles of Glenmalure many a crimson banquet while Wexford lay fainting at the feet of Lake. Over the curving sea, Devereux and Tone, and many another unselfish spirit, prayed and worked unceasingly that the latest expedition should be got ready for sailing, ere the life blood had been drained

from their suffering land. But the Consul, disliking Irishmen, and dazzled by a mighty dream, dallied with the time that was flying so fast and the occasion, that alas, would never return.

Through all this Irene Neville dwelt secure in the lovely vale of Inistiogue where summer lived out its perfumed life as splendidly as if Wexford, only six miles distant, was not rocking in death struggle for a freedom which her sons proved themselves so worthy of achieving.

On the weary day when Heathcote tramped thither, she was at Mr Rossiter's, having been brought there by Mr Gash's arrangement from Rosbercon, a fact which accounts for the ignorance of the women concerning her destination, setting out next day for the little Kilkenny village, her modest travelling equipage having been seen by Heathcote as he rode northward.

At Inistiogue, poor Miss Prue having leisure, fell ill, and was nursed assiduously by the girl, who although her hosts were considerate, found how evil a thing it is to ascend and descend the stairs of another. During this time Gash saw her frequently, always on some strictly business matter, for the present position of her father's affairs, now that all documents had been destroyed, was to her a source of poignant anxiety. When Miss Prue grew a little better she contemplated a journey to Dublin, though the country was still disturbed and every mile meant a shilling. She felt too that some account should be given to Miss Prudence for the money which she understood had been entrusted to her father's keeping, and at times the thought that probably it had followed the course of all money which came into his open hands made her avoid meeting the old gentlewoman's eye, as she sat by the window, propped up in her pillows, and she would steal away to weep over what she could not mend.

Miss Prudence saw something of this and spoke plainly to the girl when sobbing she told her sorrow.

"Suppose it is all gone, my dear," she said, stroking the little hands she had taken from Irene's face, "can crying bring it back? What good will your going to Dublin do? Sneem & Cobay will only see your weakness and act upon it. Oh, if we had only a man to understand those things—like Major Heathcote, how soon we should know our position. I wonder where he can be, we have not heard a word from him since last June. I pray God that he be not killed!"

"Amen," sighed Irene, and she thought of certain things which do not come within the compass of this tale.

"And yet," continued Miss Prue, "it is a man of affairs we want most; influence and character are all very well in their way, but it is a precious thing to have a man who knows how to deal with business people, which means to have the ability to be a rogue, and yet remain a gentleman. Major Heathcote was hardly sympathetic enough for that."

She paused, Irene knew what was in her mind and blushed to find the words called up the face of Mr Gash. Before she could reply that gentleman was announced, powdered as to his head, lacquered as to his boots, faultlessly attired, and cheerful as a physician in good practice.

He was deferential with Miss Prue and playful with Irene. On the subject being broached, he had, he said, ordered the ruins of Malplaquet House to be searched for any valuables which might have escaped the fury of the mob, but found little beyond some books, which had been stored at the Hermitage until the heiress of Malplaquet could give order for their disposal.

In answer to Miss Prue's anxious inquiries, he stated that the place was absolutely uninhabitable, and ventured to think that it might be better policy to build a new house of more moderate dimensions which might be amplified later by wings, if necessary.

"But where is Irene to get the money?" asked Miss

Prue. "It was only this morning we had a letter—respectful I must say, full of polite expressions of condolence and so on, from Messrs Sneem & Cobay who wish to know if Irene has had a valuator to fix the amount of mischief done."

"Who are those gentlemen?" said Mr Gash softly, ignoring the fact that they would be the last people in the world to ask such a question about *him*.

"Well, I cannot exactly say," replied Miss Prudence, "but they lend money on notes of hand—is it not so, Irene? And on bills renewable three, four, or eight months after date—or before date—at the option—I think it is the option of the holder."

"Yes," said Mr Gash, "option is a good word. Mr Neville has had dealings with them I presume?"

"I believe so," replied Miss Prudence, "he has had frequent dealings with the sort of people who lend money, nay, force it on one, and are then in a perpetual fever to get it back, and always at the most inconvenient time too."

"I quite understand that," observed Mr Gash. "Creditors are a race apart, if you borrow their dirty guineas, and are, through any whim of chance, able to pay them back soon after, they refuse to take their money and try to negotiate fresh loans, but directly some mischievous sprite entangles your affairs—the most common contingency—they process you, and would sell the very coat off a man's back to see themselves safe. But this particular instance is a very fortunate one for us now, if the official valuator has not arrived at Malplaquet, though we expect him daily, Messrs Sneem & Cobay will be exactly the persons to transact the affair for us with him, they will see that a proper value is put on the place."

"Your plan is to get them to act as our agents?" said Miss Prue, "Ah, what a good idea, they will pay themselves!"

"Exactly," replied Mr Gash, "it will be a great chance for them, and if the business be well carried through, it may mean clearing the estate without one penny out of your pockets."

"Who will pay?" asked Irene, who, since the truth must be told, had been surreptitiously examining the state of her eye-lids in a mirror opposite.

"The county," replied Mr Gash suavely.

"Our neighbours?" said the girl.

"Aye, I daresay," answered Mr Gash, "and as they will of course make their croppy tenants pay *them*, the disloyal will suffer eventually. I have not troubled the Government about my place at the Hermitage, my rascal tenants are rebuilding it under promise of protection, and doing it very well too."

"I would rather sell the land," said Irene Neville after a long pause, and the humming of a bee amid the sweet pea outside rang through the little room.

"What does it matter to you, child, once money is got by those people?" said Miss Prue pettishly.

"By exaggerating the damage done?" cried Irene. "By a lie? By setting those blood-suckers who have drained my father's estate again and again, to squeeze more out of the unfortunate wretches whose money we took year after year, and whom we could not protect, no, not for one day, when the sweepings of Cork door-steps were let loose upon them! No! I will sell the place in open market for what it will fetch. Malplaquet! It was my mother's—and that plot over in New Ross too. Let it all go, we are shamed enough already!"

She paused, tears dimming her beautiful eyes, blood darkening brow and cheek. Mr Gash's face grew very white. Miss Prudence put out her trembling arms and clasped the girl to her bosom, stroking the little head with its great coils of brown tresses that had been guiltless of powder for many a day.

"My darling," she murmured, "our blood speaks in you.

Forgive me, oh forgive me—but as one grows old, dear, one learns to think like a rogue. One forgets that to be sharp is to be mean—dishonest. And if we were not so, we suffer for it; the struggle is harder than you know, Irene."

Gash as soon as he felt the women's eyes were not upon him, looked steadfastly on Irene, and never since first he saw her did he desire her with more honest passion. "She is worth wading hell for," he thought. "What a mother for my children—to teach them to be and to speak as I have lost the right to do. In thy smock, sweet maid, thou art richer than a harem in diamonds!"

The next instant he was himself, the self circumstance and folly had made him.

Drawing near the couch, he timidly touched one of the girl's rounded shoulders; the contact made him thrill.

"Forgive me too," he said. "I might have known. As God is my Judge, I have grown so innured to deal with rascals that I had forgotten there were others in the world. Give the business into my hands, and I shall get as fair a valuation as may be, the damage is great—nay, you shall pay me—I hope to find a purchaser for the place at New Ross."

He paused, Irene Neville lifted her head and looked him straight in the face.

"Lord Castlereagh?" she said quietly. "I know—that letter never went."

Mr Gash had a very keen sense of the humour of the Devil's Comedy he and his kind had been acting in Ireland, and now it proved almost too great for him, but the value of the stake for which he played gave him strength to repress the smile quivering upon his lip as he averted his face.

"Perhaps a less exalted, but as disinterested a purchaser would suit," he said quietly. "It is admirably situated; I will buy it myself."

"Will you give Lord Castlereagh's price?" rejoined Irene with a fine smile.

This time Gash laughed outright. "I am a poor man," he said, "and his lordship a rich one. I do happen to know that he intended buying the place for certain improvements he contemplated, he would have paid highly because he looked beyond the immediate value of things, but that was before Mr Neville—before the outbreak, and of course matters are changed. I will give five hundred pounds for it, I cannot afford another penny. Five hundred pounds for a woman's good opinion," he thought, "what would they say in Crow Street!"

Irene's eyes glistened. "I will sell it," she said, glancing at her aunt, "and our lawyers will make the conveyance as soon as you please."

"A thousand thanks," replied Mr Gash, feeling his head whirl and the humour of the situation gripping him almost to suffocation. "But with your permission, I shall have no parchment work, or dealing with lawyers either. I shall pay the money and hold the place at your good will, or not at all. Patience," he thought, "egad I am going too far."

Miss Prue looked uneasily at the girl, the glance in her hollow eyes inexpressibly appealing, the sum would mean so much to them both just then, would give breathing time and enable them to live their own lives until—something could be done, that state of most unblessed expectancy in which so many Irish gentlewomen live. Irene caught the glance, a sense of triumph came to her, she could repay the debt she felt her father owed to Miss Prudence, in some way at least.

"I shall sell on those terms, sir," she said, and she reached her hand, like the noble child she was, across the couch, "but there may be claims upon the land."

"I shall settle all such claims, I assure you," replied the other, glad of an excuse to hold that dimpled hand. "Oh, I am not at all philanthropic, I shall make it pay.

His lordship wanted it for docks. Ha! ha! but I shall build upon it. By the way," he continued, there is quite a fresh breeze blowing, and I think you had some horse furniture in the cart coming hither, we might ride over there at once, and see the place—you know its situation?"

"Yes," replied Irene, looking at Miss Prue.

"It would be better to go," said the sick woman, "Mr Tottenham has, I recollect, a place near it, and he will, I am sure, show you over the ground, if you are in any doubt as to the boundary, and so forth."

"Nothing could be better," said Mr Gash, laughing, "the ride will raise your spirits too, and dissipate the vapours famously."

"My habit is somewhat travel-stained," observed Irene, who secretly feared lest her hostess, who had already displayed some anxiety as to their protracted stay, should refuse the loan of a horse, but Mr Gash airily over-ruled this objection, and as if guessing how matters were, sauntered to the stables, where he had the best nag saddled without any scrupulous inquiries as to the owner's wishes. That personage seeing them from afar cantering away, hastened home, rated the groom, who displayed a penitence proportionate to Mr Gash's tip, and then mounting to Miss Prue's room, spoke somewhat plainly on the subject, until she was informed that neither Irene nor herself would any longer trouble the household, and would most cheerfully pay, if need be, for their accommodation; a retort which gave Miss Prue unmitigated satisfaction.

As Irene and Gash approached New Ross, the havoc caused by the late siege became awfully apparent, almost every yard of the way from Rosbercon bearing some marks of the desperate fighting or the deliberate devastation of the soldiery, and as she rode along the quay she was often obliged to look aside for some land mark amid the jumbled ruin of houses and shops skirting the debris-narrowed way. Then she thought of Devereux, too, and her cheek flushed as she remembered their first meeting

there and last parting. She wondered if he had found the horse she sent after him, but she had little time for reflection, Mr Gash making continual claims upon her attention, until she paused at the entrance of Neville's property, with its rows of cottages, which she saw had not suffered much from the battle, their position being of no strategic value to either party.

They dismounted, and Irene showed him over the little place by the Barrow, entering each cabin with a few kind words to every soul there, and receiving even in that time of sorrow that warmth of greeting which the Irish heart gives so readily in return for so little—merely because Neville had not been a tyrant; small favours find ready appreciation in Ireland.

"Be kind to them, they have suffered much," said Irene, as they turned from the last door.

"I trust that they will never have cause to regret the change of ownership," replied Gash gravely. "Mr Neville's conduct shall be my precedent. But," he added playfully, as they went towards their horses, "it was customary in the old days to deliver land by livery of seizen—a blade of grass, a few leaves, a flower; will you not keep up the ancient fashion, oh, Lady of the Land?"

Irene smiled, the mediæval fancy pleasing her, and looking round—the place where they stood was barren, but close at hand, over some boarding knocked to pieces by a cannon ball half a rose bush was blooming with late clusters, the rest cut by grape as evenly as by shears—she stretched her arm over the barricade and plucked a bud or two.

"There, sir," she said, handing them to him with a pretty curtsy, "you are now seized of the land and all building or tenements whatsoever thereupon, with all riparian rights, to have and to hold as long as grass grows and water runs in the land of Eire. There! am I not a most accomplished chatelaine?"

"The Lady of Ross, Rose Macrume herself, could not

have done it better," replied Mr Gash, as he assisted her to mount.

"But I have forgotten to bequeath you the debts, Mr Gash," said the girl, smiling sadly; "there must be debts."

"If there are, they will be on my side," replied the other, and he meant it.

In the cool of the evening they both rode back to Inistiogue, under a young moon, the scent of the hay sweet on the air, and the murmur of the Nore water making a low accompaniment to their softened voices and even once to Irene's laughter.

"By the way, Mr Gash," said Miss Prue, as they parted later on, "you spoke of building at New Ross; may one ask what you will build?"

"Assuredly—my fortune," replied the other, and he thought of the rose in his breast.

"That it may thrive with you!" replied the lady heartily, and Irene blushed, though she could not tell why.

CHAPTER XXXII

On Major Heathcote's arrival at Wicklow he was unconscious, and lay for many days between death and life, for in addition to his broken arm he had sustained a fracture of the ribs, and a slight injury to one lung. As soon as it was possible for him to travel, the doctors had a boat secured to take him to England, where the tedious nature of his hurts might receive the attention they demanded. The slight fever accompanying the first part of his illness left him very weak, and he listlessly acquiesced in those arrangements after having broken down miserably in an attempt to assert himself against the debility, whose leaden hand weighed so heavily upon him.

He would have preferred to remain in Ireland until he had received some news of Irene, but although he questioned one or two of the officers who had been at New Ross, he failed to discover any clue, and he shrank from specific inquiries owing to a feeling which it is not difficult to understand, considering his appreciation of the men with whom he had been obliged to associate. Once or twice he had almost decided to remain, and risk the danger of relapse, but on the other hand the conviction that England needed every sword at her disposal bade him put the thought aside, even when he was most conscious of his uselessness.

Once at home, he was immediately ordered to a southern village magnificent in autumn glory, which had been old in the days of Herrick. One of those slumberous places with yews that date from Cressy year and oaks that had been saplings when Queen Bess went a-maying in the green-wood. A gay spot too, with the

open-air gaiety of Shakespeare who would have found little changed could he have returned to quaff its golden ale and jest with its maids or gossip with its men. Pagan it was, or worse, unconsciously Catholic, when judged by the standard of the sour-minded knaves who prate of an "open Bible," and rob in the name of God, keeping too under its thatched gables the real virtue which has made England great, and who knows, may yet have power to keep her glorious when the day of trial comes.

Bit by bit his health improved, and with its mending came a longing for active life. Accordingly, he went up to London, whither he had sent, reporting himself and explaining his illness. Here he learned for the first time of his supposed death, attended a levee and met the minister who was congratulatory but vague, no fresh designs being apparently meditated against France. Neither did he learn much in the clubs or coffee-houses about Ireland, the conversations turning on the descent upon Holland, the victory in Aboukir Bay, Mr Pitt's income-tax scheme, the taking of Minorca, the capture of St. Domingo, or the prospect of an alliance with the Turks and Russians. He had not the energy to seek an audience with the King, from a conviction slowly growing on him that he was perhaps regarded in some light as a failure, and he disdained to advertise his merit. "If they wish to overlook me, let 'em," he thought, "they know where I am."

Acting on this determination, he held aloof from any function where his presence was not actually commanded, knowing that he might meet and talk with members of Government for days or weeks without learning anything save what he might hear at the coffee-houses, and he was far too well versed in the ways of courts to ask untimely questions. However, he was not idle, and working as well as he could under the circumstances, drew up a *resumé* of his former reports while he awaited replies to some letters he had written to the county Wexford, one to Captain Keough, the other to Mr Tottenham at New

Ross. He did not get any reply to the first, but after some time received a brief communication from the latter gentleman, saying that Miss Phaire and her niece had left the town. Forced to content himself with this he waited patiently on, his solitary pleasure, strolling through the streets where he sought distraction from the thoughts which beset him in solitude.

He was about to have a solution sooner than he expected. One day passing the Piazza in Covent Garden, he found a group of persons about a coach which had lost a wheel, and was blocking the way, one of its axles propped against a bench, while some men were busy about it. The ladies, who had evidently been in the vehicle at the time of the accident, had alighted and were chatting briskly in French, one habited in deep black was a stranger, the other was Nellie Bird.

Seeing that no gentleman was with them, Heathcote advanced and proffered his services, hoping too that he would be able to learn something of Malplaquet. To his surprise, Miss Bird manifested unmistakable embarrassment a moment, and answered his questions briefly by stating that she had been out of Ireland for some time and had no wish to return thither, and without giving him time for further questioning, launched into the topics of the hour.

The other lady who had begun to converse in broken English with one of the men repairing the wheel, bore a wedding ring on one mittened little hand, and was so decidedly a *grand dame* that he felt inclined to ask Miss Bird who she was, but the latter gave him no opportunity whatever, and as soon as the wheel had been put into position, some minutes later, both got hurriedly in and were driven off.

"I wonder what she can have heard about me that she should go off thus," mused the soldier, "I dare swear there has been some talk, but the other is worth following up."

One of the men who had been engaged at the wheel was drawing on his coat, and looking after the carriage, he had a military air.

"Do you know those ladies, friend?" said Heathcote.

"Aye, sir," replied the man, "the mourning one, she's lately come out of Ireland, a Lady Fitzgerald. I served with her husband in the fifty-sixth regiment, me and Sergeant Cobbett, you have heard tell of him, he's in America now. Many's the time I heard him say Lord Edward Fitzgerald was the only really honest officer he ever knew. It's a damned sad business, sir, about him dying as he did, and getting taken up with those Frenchies, he got Cobbett his discharge and many's the good turn he done me and others. Who the second lass is I can't tell, but if she's as good as she's pretty, it's all right."

Tossing the man a crown Heathcote sauntered on to Charing Cross, lost in thought. That evening he went to the Theatre Royal to witness one of Sheridan's comedies, and after the play was over strolled up the Strand, looking for a coach. Presently a young woman whom he had observed glancing at him with something between the leer of a courtesan and the timidity of a child, passed him and turning, gazed suddenly into his face almost appealingly.

Heart-sick as he was, the pathos of the regard struck him, and lifting his moody brow, he scrutinized her attentively; the features were dimly familiar. She giggled, and looking half-timidly, half-roguishly into his eyes, exclaimed,

"La! Major Heathcote, and don't you remember me? I knew you directly I clapped eyes on you talking to the ladies to-day."

"Who are you, girl?" said Heathcote.

"La! indeed, Major," she went on, ambling at his side, poor wench, and affecting to fan herself with a play-bill, "we went night-walking once upon a time in Wexford all among the bogs. He! he!"

In a moment he recollected.

"Lard! you forget me now, I vow?" she continued. "You was so quick hopping the ditches that you lost your way; but, lookye, there's your ring."

Heathcote took the ornament, and glanced at the tower and its wings. "How did you come here?" he asked at last, the transformation was so complete that he could hardly credit his senses.

"La! now, but that's a long story," she retorted, "I ought not to tell it to everyone perhaps, but you are a member of the Government, are you not?"

They had stopped before a tavern, and the light caught the woman's face from which the innate simplicity of regard had not yet vanished, despite her equivocal manner. Like most of his countrymen in that robust day, Heathcote cared little for appearances, and if he did, even hypocrisy would have not to fear at that time and place too rigid a censorship. He slipped the ring on his finger.

"Wilt come in and have a pint of wine," he said, "you can tell me all about the adventure?"

The girl appeared to hesitate. "La! now, her ladyship will be expecting me," she said, "though if it's too late, I can lodge with my cousin over against the Sheaf of Corn in Fleet Street. You was very polite to her to-day—I didn't know you knew Miss Bird, oh, she's the clever one. Her ladyship's but a blind bat to her."

"That is Lady Fitzgerald?" observed Heathcote quietly, as they took their places in one of those honest little oak-panelled recesses so common then, whence Steele had penned more than one letter to his "dear Prue."

"Yes, indeed, but she's had trouble. Wasn't it awful—her husband the dear gentleman?" answered the girl. "But Miss Bird—she's a needle for sharpness, she is I vow! I hope she won't find out I was walking with you, she don't like you I warrant."

"Indeed?" said Heathcote. "I am sorry, though I know little about her. Waiter, a bottle of Port wine."

"Aye, but she knows a great deal about you, and a spark of hers, a man I can't abide—Captain Harvey, he calls himself—though he's no more captain nor Harvey than I am. I know him. But, la! I hold my tongue—a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse. He's in Ireland now though."

"Aha, in Ireland?" remarked Heathcote thoughtfully. "And what is this captain's real name?"

The girl glanced over her shoulder, and looked at her companion mysteriously. "You won't tell, or get a poor maid into trouble that wants to do you good?" she murmured.

"No, my wench," replied Heathcote. "Do I look like such a one?"

"Mavrone! no! I don't see your skin on any of 'em!" cried the girl with Irish readiness.

"Oho, that's a compliment!" laughed the soldier. "But about this man?"

"Well, his name's Harrigan—Steve Harrigan."

Major Heathcote took out a cigar case and selecting an Indian cheroot, lit it slowly. His hand shook, he frowned, noting this sign of weakness. "Well?" he said.

"He's no more captain than I am," repeated the girl, "but he is a devil out of hell, of that I am sure—I heard talk about him in Wexford that night yer hanner met me. Oh then, 'tis yourself put the good hand in me! Let me tell you! That same night my cousin a carrier to Ferns, found me, and never stopped till he brought me all the way up to Dublin, and I was engaged for service by a nice lady, almost as soon as my foot touched the flags. She trained me to wait on the quality, and got my cousin a good place here, and so I kem into the service of her ladyship—but 'twas Miss Bird got me there—oh she's the lady. But as for *him*, I shouldn't be surprised if he got his living by 'Stand and deliver!' like the fellow in the play. I know a mort about 'em both by this, for I do be often listening to 'em fighting."

"You must not have much to do if you can spend your time thus," said Heathcote. "How come you to hear them?"

"Oh," replied the girl mysteriously, "that's my office. Nay, ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies. This wine's most comforting. How white these ruffles be! Real Dowlas, or out of Flanders I'd swear—where the Jacobite spies are?"

Heathcote gazed at her gravely through the smoke. "The Jacobite spies?" he said. "What have you, mistress, to do with such?"

The girl laughed and tossed her head. "Oh, more than you know," she replied. "You military folk are not everything. We Government people can do a lot in our own way."

"And are you in the Government?" asked Heathcote, staring at that silly face.

The maid tossed her head again. "'Tis not for me to talk secrets," she rejoined, "but all the same, as you are in a manner one of us, sir, I don't mind saying as how I am—I'm watching Lady Fitzgerald."

It is possible that the expression on Heathcote's face bore some significance for her, because she cast down her eyes and simpered arranging the dainty lace-edged apron she wore. "I know it's not as glorious as hunting the croppies," she said, "but it's profitable, and very responsible, one moving in a manner with the best sassiety. It would surprise you to see the company Miss Bird do keep; yes, quite regular, reely! Even a certain person whose name begins with 'G'—now! But 'H,' he don't like it, he says he has a prior claim."

"What is it you *do*?" said Heathcote, wondering how he should reach the intelligence behind that foolish face.

"Well, I keep a strict watch upon her ladyship," replied the girl, lowering her voice, "her goings out and her comings in, and her this and her that. Then, I take my budget over to Miss Bird in Piccadilly, or she'll meet

me at my cousin's at the Sheaf of Corn, and so the Lords of the Admiralty, and the Government get to know what she's doing and thinking of—and all through me, though you wouldn't believe it, to see me. And listen, but this is a secret, when I haven't anything to tell, I jest make up a story as I go along, and it does as well! That's how we manage 'em!" she went on, putting down her glass and folding her arms.

Heathcote stared at her. Was this, he asked himself, the same poor thing who had panted and sobbed in his arms a few months ago. He did not know that the effrontery of ignorance and innocence is the most readily acquired, and the most impenetrable.

"Lard, how this wine do make my head go round!" continued the girl, "you are sure that you did not put anything into it—you gentlemen are so smart? Ha! ha! Miss Bird has wine too, though not so good as this, I often brought her a bottle, but it looks fine in the cut decanters, dads, you'd think it was Tokay, she pours it out with such an air for the P. Just like this—oh I vow the glass overflowed! There, there, least said soonest mended. Is your waistcoat spoiled? Nay? I'm pure glad, for 'tis pretty sprigged work too. Oh, but I have great fun, listening to 'em. She said yesterday she'd rather be in hell than his wife, and he said very likely she'd be both, and asked back his money, but she snapped her fingers in his face, and he said she was no better than the Prince's Miss, which made her fly into a passion, and she swore she'd never speak to him until he'd done what she wanted. She called him an ungrateful dog after all she'd done for him—getting him pardoned."

"Getting him pardoned?" said Heathcote.

"Aye, sir, she said that Castlereagh stood his friend because of her relations—she's highly connected."

Heathcote bit his lip.

"Oh yes," continued the girl, "and what else is this she said? Well, I vow my head's going three-na-caila,

you mustn't believe half I'm saying, I'll be talking about my rich relations next. He! he! What's this I was saying?"

"Castlereagh's pardon?" prompted Heathcote, his head on his hand.

"Oh ifecks, that's just what she did say, and says he, 'God's curse! Do you want me to shoot the man dead in London streets?'"

"Shoot whom?" said Heathcote.

The woman looked straight at him, lifting her brows. "Why that's what they never mentioned," she said with some faint recollection it may have been, of high breeding transmitted, God knows how, through centuries of cringing lives from a brighter past.

"Me?" whispered Heathcote, and under the stress of the question his face changed to a younger type, that made it in singleness of expression resemble hers; they might have been a boy and girl discussing some absorbing topic.

"Yes, it was you, sir," replied the maid, softly, and unconsciously reaching for his clenched hand upon the table. "He said he thought you were dead, and—he! he!—damned. He do speak coarse sometimes."

Heathcote's face darkened.

"Oh la!" she cried, "don't look at me like that. I vow you are like King or Boyd, 'twas thus they looked when I used see 'em judging the people in Wexford!"

"Nay, maidy," replied the soldier, "but tell me all you can recollect. God! 'tis a pretty business! Tell all!"

She leaned towards him, looking up into his face with swimming eyes, so that he repented having given her drink.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" she repeated, with tipsy coquetry. "Oh I do hope that man gone out wasn't listening!"

Heathcote glanced round and saw the skirt of a disappearing coat. "Pshaw, what can he know? He must

have been asleep," he said. "But what did this woman say?"

"Oh, she said this and she said that, 'twas as good as a play," replied the girl. "'What's this?—shoot him!' says she, laughing scornfully. 'No, but get another to do so, another that have a dearer right.' 'I've right and reason enough, my beauty,' says he, his fist in his hand. 'Aye, aye, she says, 'but hasn't Phil Gash more—you only obeyed orders, ha! ha! but 'twas he took the pocket-book to Castlereagh'—whatever she meant by that. ''Twas,' says he, short. 'Very well,' says she, 'if Gash could be hung for *his* murder, Castlereagh would lend the very bell ropes in his house to string him up!' 'How damned hard you hate a body,' says he, 'just because he made you come a little out of your way—haven't you a better reason, hey?' 'Oh sir,' she says, talking like Mrs Siddons, 'the oddest thing about our best and our worst actions is in-in-inadequacy of motive. And anyway,' she says, 'I have a better reason to hate him than to love you.' 'Ecod you're out there,' says he, 'for you have a thousand pounds of my money, and you never had as much of his I'll go bail'—that's Mr Gash's, sir, he's a gentleman from near my place——"

"I know, I know," hissed Heathcote. "They are all gentlemen. Go on."

"Oh la! Well I vow—what's this? Oh yes! 'That's a damned lie,' says she, clapping her hands together, 'for I spent every penny of't, and didn't I deserve it—saving your thief's neck from the gallows?' Then he laughed, for he does like a quick answer, if it be against himself, I must say that, and said he was going back to Ireland and would do what he could. He said he might have a chance too of catching one Devereux there, who was with the Frenchies, and had a reward on his head, and he said this same man was the means of making him come back to London, because he saw him in Hamburg and denounced him to the United Irishmen there."

"The pocket-book," murmured Heathcote. "Great God! I see it all! Listen, girl, did they use my name once?"

"Well, in truth and fairety, they did, and many times," replied the maid laying her hand on his arm, "'twas about you they were talking all the time. She main hates you because she says you were stiff and grand in your manner, and did not think the Irish gentry good enough to wipe your boots on, and were disrespectful to her brother. 'But,' says she, 'if he finds what you know, he may prove dangerous, for the King's his friend though cracked.'"

"Hold your tongue," said the officer, "His Majesty, God bless him, is an honest man, and that is reason enough to win the abuse of such a trull."

"Och eyeh, draw it mild; she does not value your king a farthing," retorted the woman, putting one knee over the other, and nodding her head. "She says 'twas she and her family put the crown on King Billy's skull, and that as he hadn't spunk enough to have a child, it all come to the lucky Hanover crew, as she calls 'em. My ears do be rattled by the way she talks of kings and queens and warming pans and wooden shoes, till one would think that but for her and the Orangemen England would be under the sea."

Heathcote swore softly, raised his clenched hand, and brought it noiselessly down upon the table.

"Oh ifecks, she carried on bravely," continued the woman, "and I behind the door, peppering lest the lodging-house servant would come up and catch me, but she was talking bawdy to Harrigan's servant below in the hall—he has a couple of 'em, servants he calls 'em, it's foot-pads would be nearer the mark I'm thinking. Oh ifecks, I'm talking too much myself. Swear upon the cross of your fingers you won't tell, now, sure you won't?"

"No, no," said Heathcote rising as she rose, and observing that the effect of the drink was wearing off fast. "Look ye, lass, when last I saw you, I promised to help

you if I could, and so I shall if it be you care for an honest man's help— if you remain an honest lass still."

"Oh, that I am," replied the girl arranging her tucker, "all the fine sparks at Mrs Calf's couldn't get round me. Oh yes, a girl must be careful."

"Mrs Calf?" said Heathcote with a reminiscence of Dublin gossip.

"Aye, she's grand too," answered the maid, "she's a by-blow of Miss Bird's father—she told me so."

"Faugh! sweeten thy mind and turn to honest ways," said the soldier. "Nay, I'll stand thy friend, and better than I. Leave that service, and I'll find thee employment such as a maid may do with honour: for when the years come, and thou hast sense, thou'lt be cursed hard, or shamed. Fie, a spy's a dirty thing!"

"Oh la! but it's grand," replied the poor wench, spreading forth her brocaded petticoat. "That was given me by Miss Bird—wilt get me as fine clothes?"

"I'll get thee where thou shalt not wear any woman's cast-offs," answered Heathcote, "and where thou wilt not be ashamed to look the world in the face, and be pensioned in thy honourable old age. Pshaw, this woman Bird is a paltry thing; nay, do not cry, meet me here to-morrow and thou shalt see. 'Ods life, I swear there are ladies of quality in this town, real ladies, who would like to have such as thee about them, neat-handed and pretty too, egad," he continued, pinching the white cheeks before him. "So: let's go. I'll get thee a coach to thy cousin's. Remember, to-morrow at noon."

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONTRARY to his expectation, the girl did not appear at the place appointed next day, and having made cautious inquiries, he perambulated the streets, hoping to meet her, but vainly. With the vague idea of putting an advertisement into one of the new sheets, he bought a paper which professed to give the latest intelligence from Ireland concerning the abortive French expedition, and the end of Humbert's magnificent march into the very heart of that hostile land in the pathetic hope of bringing liberty, equality and fraternity to the one nation in Europe which needed them most and could profit by them least.

Another day passed, his advertisement appeared, and expecting that she would see it, he waited another and another. Then he went to the play, and took the route he had followed on the evening when she had accosted him, but without any result, and wearied out he returned to his lodgings, where late as the hour was he sat down to his reports again, but had not been long so engaged when a lady attired in a richly furred riding-habit was ushered into the room.

As he rose, he saw that she was masked, though the wide hat and nodding plumes she wore completely shaded her face. The suppleness of the movements of the noble figure showed she was young. The contour of the hidden countenance and the light in the eyes suggested that she was beautiful. Heathcote waited, his mouth set.

"Sir," she said after a pause, "you will, I trust, pardon an intrusion whose only excuse is an interest in you and an anxiety for your welfare."

Heathcote bowed.

"I have come," continued the lady, "to speak to you on matters which touch great people and may be the ruin of certain little ones, therefore I beg that you will pledge your word of honour to keep this interview secret."

"I shall be willing to give that pledge," replied Heathcote, "when I know to whom to give it, and why it is asked."

"Will you not trust me?" replied the lady, in a tone that was soft as the murmur of distant water. "I am a woman and defenceless here, my profession would make me an easy prey, if not a shining mark, were I known to certain people as the teller of what I have to say."

Heathcote with suddenly sharpened wits recollected having heard the tones of that voice before, and not long ago either.

"The prologue is interesting, madam," he answered at a venture, "but, like many of our modern plays, may prove the best part of the piece."

The eyes behind the mask flashed brightly. "Faith, there is some sense in that," observed his visitor in an altered tone, "but by my word, Major Heathcote, you will not quarrel with the interest of the play after the first act, though whether it is to be a tragedy or a comedy rests with yourself. And would you like to know who I am?"

"Yes," he replied, "for many reasons."

She laughed, and unclasping the mask revealed the features of the girl who had knocked Mrs Calf's head against Mr Gash's that night in the drinking club in Werburg Street.

"I saw you in the house to-night," she said. "So I found out where you lodged, and came on at once. But I'm tired of standing. Are those English manners?"

"Oh, pardon me!" said Heathcote, pushing forward a chair.

"And now, your promise?" said the lady, taking it.

"Certainly," replied the soldier; "I shall treat this interview as secret, come what may."

"I am very glad of that," answered the lady, "and not the least reason for my joy is that it will be good for the present deponent. And now, Major Heathcote," she continued, "tell me, do you recognise that?" And she placed before him his pocket-book.

In spite of himself he leaped to his feet. "Where did you get it?" he cried. "When?—Who gave it to you?"

"Aristotle was a great man with his 'whys' and his 'whens' and his 'wheres,'" said the girl smoothly, "but neither Aristotle nor wild horses would drag that out of me. So you'll have to take back your property and ask no questions."

Heathcote turned over page after page, his brow darkening; several were annotated in pencilling imperfectly erased, and the characters were not those of Castlereagh, but of a greater than he. The lady watched him, her hand on her mouth.

"Hah!" he exclaimed, closing the book, "we shall see to this!"

"If I were your sister or your wife," said the woman, "I should say do something that's nearer to you, or if you have a taspy for doing things, volunteer for India. You don't know where you are walking, blind man!"

Heathcote looked at her, a fierce light in his eye. "I have neither sister nor wife to regret or to warn me," he answered bitterly, "and the land where I walk is the land of England, I have walked in more dangerous places—I know more than you think, I know where this was got."

"Aye, but do you know to whom it was given?" cried the woman. "That's the rub! Major Heathcote, don't go back to Ireland whatever you do."

"Oh, everything is just as it was," continued Heathcote, reopening the book and examining a pocket let into one of the covers. "Here they are, the King's commission,

the King's letter, the King's orders! 'Sdeath, do you know what it means to rob a King's messenger? Do you know that the King's writ runs as truly yonder as here? Do you think that the arm which will crush Tippo Sahib is not long enough to reach Dublin?"

The other clapped her hands together. "No, by God!" she cried with awful vehemence, "it is not! it is not! and you'll find it so, mo bouchal, if you try to ride the high horse! Why man alive, they don't care over there for George, or England, or kings or queens. So long as they do the work of English ministers, they can do what they like. They are strangling a nation, and they know they will be easily forgiven any awkwardness in the doing of it, so it's done. English Justice can mislay her sword sometimes, let me tell you."

"I know nothing about that," replied Heathcote wincing. "But this I do know, the power which impeached Hastings will not quail before a parcel of Irish rats."

"Yes, and it took seven years for the mountain to bring forth the mouse," cried the woman. "He was not quite attentive enough to the interests of humanity! A deal he cares, over there in Worcestershire, for the condemnation of the people in whose interests he did what he did. But, listen here," she continued, her voice sinking to a whisper, "Can the power which impeached Hastings bring back the girl with whom you were drinking a few nights ago? Aye, you may well stare. She was found dead in the Thames—I daresay you read of it—drowned, but, there were black marks upon her throat."

Heathcote paled. "So soon!" he muttered. "Poor wench, I feared something of the kind."

"Aye," continued the girl, "you see what short work they made of her, yet, can you prove anything? Listen, I had a sister down in Wexford, and she 'impeached' a black-hearted wretch named Harrigan—ah, your eyes lighten—to Father John Murphy, on Vinegar Hill, and next day she was burnt alive—alive, man! in Scullabogue

barn, and the hand that fired the thatch was the hand of Harrigan. May the Devil roast it, and his black heart, in Hell for ever, as long as God is God! Yet, man, I must leave him to God, because of the hand which shelters him!"

"What was her name?" said Heathcote, looking up from the pocket-book.

"Did you ever hear tell of one Kitty Creagh?" replied the woman.

There was genuine sorrow on the soldier's face. "Ah, dear Lord," he said, "and is it so? I knew her well, she did me a great kindness. Let be, my lass, it is only another count in the indictment."

The woman had begun to weep silently; he crossed to where she sat, and took her hands.

"You were sent here by someone whose name I shall not ask, to frighten me into not going to Ireland?" he said, looking into her eyes.

"I'm afraid it's a bad journey," she answered brokenly.

"Yes," he said, "it will be a bad journey for those rogues. Take heart, girl, within another month Harrigan will dangle from a gibbet, and the other sly devil suffer too, if law can plait a noose for a man's neck. You see I know more than you think. And," he continued, remembering the waiting maid's talk, "it may be that the powerful hand, about which you think so much, will not be so ready to show itself when all's said. Pshaw, rogues and their kind forgather and plot and plan and spin cob-webs to hide the sunlight from honest eyes, but straightway comes a man with a stave bearing a crown upon it, and at the very wind of the wave of it the cob-webs fall, and the spinners scuttle back into the darkness. Rascality too often rides in a golden chariot while honesty tramps afoot, but one day comes the man with the crowned stave, and rascality gets him a new carriage—a springless one—and honesty stands aside to let him go by, just once more—to Tyburn. Nay, lass, of what use were God in

heaven, or we on earth, if true men flinched before masked villains whether they bore pistols or titles?"

"Oh, then, they bear titles enough," sobbed the girl, "and they are very powerful for all you say. It seems to me that wrong is always stronger than right."

"Poor maid," said Heathcote, putting his hand upon her shoulder, "so women find but too often; yet 'tis not always so. Do not fear, justice will be done. Nay, do not tremble, none shall know—they can be reached without a word from you."

She did not reply, but stood there a few moments shivering violently. When she had somewhat recovered her composure, he drew the cloak about her with a certain rough tenderness, and repeating his promise of secrecy, conducted her himself to the door, whence she flitted into the darkness from which she had come.

Major Heathcote sat late, shaping his new path, and next day put into execution a step he had thought of several times, but had refrained from taking, feeling that it was an extreme one. He set out for Windsor, resolved to see the King. The journey was long, and the hour late when he arrived, but he found generous entertainment at the "Three Tuns," whose landlord, a cheerful farmer informed him, kept the best purl in England.

After an early breakfast the soldier set out for the Castle, and was conducted to the King's chapel, which to say sooth was not over-crowded. A little time after he had taken his place a pair of folding doors were flung open, and a small procession entered. It was not a brilliant party, amongst whom shuffled along a quiet, soberly dressed, middle-aged man who acted as clerk to the chaplain subsequently, but was outside that sacred place George the Third, King of Great Britain and Ireland. The service was not an exceedingly impressive one, and the somewhat tautological petitions might not have compared favourably with those offered in that same chapel when the old faith was a living force in England.

Still it had its significance for the thought-harassed man kneeling amid the eight or nine worshippers, where once the Black Prince himself had knelt.

"Give peace in our days, O Lord," prayed King George, "because Thou and none other fightest for us; but only Thou, O Lord God!"

Service done, Heathcote took his place amongst those waiting an audience.

When his turn came, the King drew his brows slightly together.

"Major Heathcote," he said; "ah, yes, you are lately come out of Ireland. Someone said you were killed. Ah, yes, I recollect, they gazetted you so, but it was a mistake. Ha, ha! A mistake! Why did you not come before?"

"I had awaited an order, after sending my reports from Ireland, Sir," replied the soldier.

"Reports?" said the King. "None reached me; you should have written since you came to England—Ah, yes, I recollect, you were ill, and waiting a command." He looked puzzled, lifting his eyebrows and glancing upward from under them. "Strange," he murmured; "they must have miscarried. Ireland has been very disturbed. Have you a copy?"

"Yes, please your Majesty," answered Heathcote. And he presented the report he had drawn up from memory.

The King took the document and looked over it, holding the paper close to his eyes. "Hum, hum," he murmured; "very bad, very shameful—hah, so that's how the money goes—but they beat the rebels all the same. I shall keep these; they may be useful—yes, useful. I daresay the difficulty of trans—trans—transport made the others—the others go astray. Yes? Hey?"

"It might have been that, Sir," replied Heathcote dryly.

"But when did you return to London? You look pale," said the monarch kindly.

"Some days ago," replied the officer. "I received my recall at New Ross, but being wounded at Arklow, have been invalided since."

The King nodded his head. "New Ross," he repeated; "there was a battle there, I recollect. I cannot understand. Was it signed by me?"

"Undoubtedly, Sir," answered Heathcote. And he offered the letters Gash had given him.

The King examined both. "I do not remember signing this," he said, with a pathetic smile, "but so many are signed in the day. Ah, and this is Lord Carhampton's note—very nice, very pretty. But they didn't want you all the same—Well, the rebels were beaten. There has been fighting?"

"There has been butchery," replied Heathcote. And he rapidly sketched the outlines of the campaign, the King listened eagerly, walking up and down the great hall.

"Yes, yes," he said at last, "very disgraceful. But, they were misguided wretches, French idea, French idea! They would cut off my head now, if they caught me —Hey?"

"I have heard only one disrespectful allusion to your Majesty while I was in Ireland," answered Heathcote, "and it was not from a rebel, they do not blame you for their misfortunes."

"No!" replied the King, "they are right there. I don't hate anyone, not even Catholics or Methodists, or such subversive persons. But why go back to 'em, we shall soon have active service for you in Holland or elsewhere?"

"I shall only be too happy," replied the soldier. "I have no wish for further service in Ireland, but, there are other reasons."

He then rapidly related the attack made upon him by Harrigan, the scene at the Hermitage, the theft of his commission, and the occurrence at Scullabogue of which he had heard while at New Ross.

"Ha!" said the King, "but those rascals can be punished without your help, it can be done easily."

"They are in Ireland," said Heathcote.

The King bent his brows, the soldier's tone jarred upon his ear.

"But, there must be some other reason—Hey?" he said, with one of those penetrating glances which the troubled and dimming eyes could sometimes give.

"Yes," replied the soldier, frankly. "There is a lady there, Sir, the daughter of a good friend, who is now dead, and she is I doubt not, in want of one herself now."

"Young and beautiful?" observed the King.

"Yes," answered Heathcote, colouring slightly.

"And not averse to a King's officer?" demanded George the Third, good-naturedly. "Ah, I see. Be it so, you shall do justice and woo your mistress—you have disappointments enough, something is due to your wishes. Measures shall be taken, yes, measures—this burning of persons alive is dreadful, and must be punished at once, no matter who does it. I shall give you a warrant to examine all persons concerned in that crime, and power over all Justices of the Peace in Wexford, who shall be compelled to assist you—that will make 'em civil, yes, civil. I shall write to my Lord Carhampton too, and give you control over the yeomanry there, teach the rascals discipline. You are humane, yes, and know your own mind, which is a good thing, and they shall feel they are responsible to me if not to God. I'll speak to the Attorney-General about this same Harrigan, and he will do everything needful in the legal way. As for the other —what is it? Gash? Yes. We shall see if he cannot be punished too for being accessory in the robbery, his accomplice's words are there you know, but then, those people cannot be relied upon, and we must do him justice even if he be a rogue. Oh, but something will come out under questioning."

Heathcote thought it not unlikely, but held his peace. The King spoke quickly, a little pettishly, as if he wished to keep his attention on the bare facts before him, and on them only, but the puzzled look deepened on his face. Presently he asked several questions about Irene, her father, Malplaquet, Wexford, and so forth with a minuteness of interest which was in strong contrast to the manner in which he treated the other topic.

"You do not look well," he continued, "are you sure that you are fit for travelling, not to say active service?"

"I was never better in my life, Sir," replied the hollow-eyed man, casting a weary glance at the immemorial oaks around. And, suddenly, an overmastering longing for peace beneath the shadows of such giant boughs came upon him, peace, far from plots and counterplots, blood and carnage, in some deep bosom of the eternal hills with Irene, winning the sunshine to her eye, and the rose to her lovely cheek again.

"Well," resumed the King, who had been looking through the papers, "this is bad, infamous—I wonder what Pitt can be thinking of—but all this will be settled when the Union is effected. Evil-disposed persons oppose it, Jacobins and others, but the Irish gentry are for it—hey? They have good reason to be; they see the advantage the common people cannot, they can reason."

"They appear to have weighty reasons," replied Heathcote, smiling.

"Exactly," answered the King, "it will be all well in time. It was sad about Lord Edward Fitzgerald, so well-intentioned—misguided young man. Don't you ever take up with freethinkers or the like. Wilkes—Tom Paine—Age of Reason. Ha! Ha! Age of Nonsense. He shan't have the making of our laws yet awhile, eh?"

"His French masters must traverse a somewhat perilous strip of sea first," rejoined Heathcote, "and they are bad sailors."

The King laughed, nodding his head. "Good!" he

said, and they will be very sick too—ha! ha! Did you ever read Beattie's instability — no, 'Immutability of Truth'? It pleased me exceedingly. I'll lend it to you. It's a book for a Christian gentleman."

He looked around him, and Heathcote thinking the interview over, made a low bow.

"No," said George the Third, "do not go yet, you must have something to eat, yes, and you shall see St George's Chapel—suggestions of my own." And he led the soldier from the room, talking with an easy condescension which made Johnson declare him the best bred man he ever knew. But, even at his most animated moments, when chatting on the topography of Wexford, its ruins, the improvements of the Chapel, or the Merino sheep he had purchased, the plain, homely face had under it a broken look, and the weak eyes an expression that conveyed the idea of an animal pursued by some invisible but relentless enemy.

He spoke of many things affably, as if to put the officer at his ease and assure him of his good opinion, and although he slipped from subject to subject swiftly, yet he followed each train of thought steadily, and no matter what the digression, returned to the first theme, and almost the last words he addressed the soldier concerned the legal formalities necessary for the apprehension and punishment of "those rascals," as he designated two of the most active in the vast army of rascals who were working might and main to accomplish the designs of his minister, Pitt.

Some days later Heathcote set out on his return journey to Ireland armed with extraordinary powers which boded little good to the yeomanry of Wexford, but, when he had gone some stages, a mounted messenger brought him a letter containing only the words, "Do you know that Irene Neville is married to Philip Gash?"

When he read it his first impulse was to tear the thing to fragments and grind it beneath his heel, but the chilling thought that it might be true, struck him with paralysing

force. If she was, what was taking him to Ireland? As he went on he debated the question anxiously, and had almost decided to abandon the journey, when, like a rift of blue sky through murky clouds came another thought, that it might have been a device to gain time and keep him from returning. Hardly daring to entertain it, he nevertheless came back to the consoling reflection again and again, decided finally that it was at least probable, and fearing to debate the matter further, made up his mind to take ship and see for himself, happen what might.

CHAPTER XXXIV

UNLIKE the generality of anonymous communications, that which Major Heathcote received was only too true, Irene Neville had been married some weeks to Philip Gash.

Three days after she had given him the bud at New Ross, old Nancy hobbled into her room, and without saying a word of preface, deposited upon the little work-table beside her, a silver epaulet with a shred of blue cloth still adhering, and the two women looked at each other some seconds across that blood-stained, bedraggled, significant thing.

"When did it happen?" gasped Irene at last, pale to the lips.

"I don't rightly know," replied the old woman, in a low voice, "I think it was somewhere up in Wicklow where the fighting is still, for the boats were burned at Fethard, an' he didn't go. He wasn't killed on the place, but lingered a weeny bit, and dying sent this to you by a trusty friend who dare not show here."

"And nothing else?" exclaimed Irene. "Not a word —not a line?"

"Not another bit," rejoined the woman, "I suppose he had something else to think about besides love letters, Miss Irene."

Irene Neville rose to her feet, her eyes clouded beyond the power of seeing, and groped her way forward, so that the other, perforce, feebly guided her to the very door, where a burst of weeping came to her relief, and standing between the posts of the stranger's door, she sobbed on in hopeless, irrepressible grief, until pride gave her strength to creep up the stairs to her room, where flinging herself

down upon her bed, she began to pant away the paroxysm with hot tears that fell for her lover, for her father—for all that had been. Sobbing thus Miss Prue found her on returning from an invalid's saunter along the winding road beside the Nore.

"Irene," she whispered, "what is it? Speak!" But the girl could only weep on bitterly, her bosom against the blood-stained relic, with all the passion women bestow upon the unresponsive things on which they lavish a tenderness that comes too late.

Gradually disengaging her hands, Miss Prudence saw what she wept over, and lifting her brows, drew the poor blinded face to her own. "My dear darling child," she murmured, "is it so?" And Irene, heaving convulsively, poured out the story of Devereux's secret wooing, her voice broken by rending sobs, the sacred confidences, the things that a woman can only say to a woman's ear; and then came a burst of penitence, one of the most awful things on earth, the beating of a woman's hands against the door that never opens outward, the frenzied cries behind the irrevocable, the frantic self-reproach of a love that knew not its greatness until too late.

"He was hunted like a stag across the mountains," she said, "and though Death was on his track, he dared him a thousand times for me! For me!" she continued, "the woman whose blood he saved from shame—the woman who shrunk from his side a few hours after. Love!" she sobbed, "woman's love and woman's faith! Let them not talk of such to me! Do I not know myself —coquet, coquet!"

"Irene," said Miss Prue, "there are others who saved your blood from shame; there is another who has championed you too."

"Ah yes, you do well to bid me remember the Saxon soldier," sobbed the girl, "when my country is running blood at every pore. But he was a man, and what would he say to a woman like me?"

"I do not mean Major Heathcote," replied Miss Prudence, "he has ridden away, I mean Philip Gash."

"Oh God! Do not breathe the name!" cried Irene. "*His* foe!"

"Your lover," whispered Miss Prue, looking into the eyes from which she gently kissed the tears, "I have seen and observed," she continued in a tone contrasting strangely with the simpering accent of earlier days, "and if ever man loved woman in this woful world, he loves you, Irene Neville."

The girl did not answer, but pressing close to the kindly bosom, kissed again and again the tarnished lace.

Despite her efforts, Miss Prudence coughed, and the pitiful wheezing of the lung close to her ear won Irene's thoughts to the need of the moment. Rousing herself by a great effort, she rose mechanically, rearranging her tumbled hair, and going to the mantelpiece, poured out the sedative draught her aunt was accustomed to take. Then she deliberately placed the torn epaulet between her beating breasts, remembering with a poignant shame and tenderness how Devereux had averted his eyes from them, when torn and dishevelled she had flung herself into his arms, fresh from the grasp of the English soldier.

That night she woke with a sudden, lance-like pain across her side, and hoped that it might mean death for one trembling instant, but then her sorrow came upon her, and with it irrepressible weeping that brought Miss Prudence from her sick couch, and the spectacle of the pain-wrung old woman striving to minister to the incurable, so shamed her that she strove to repress her bitter anguish and to sleep. It was not easy, but when she had grown somewhat calmer, Miss Prue coughing violently, went back, but not before she had spoken again of Philip Gash.

Time went slowly on; the two women did not speak of the subject again, Miss Prudence saw with growing anxiety the heavy shadows which had fallen on the young

girl's face, and the lassitude from which nothing appeared to have power to rouse her; but in her anxiety she forgot her own failing health, until having exerted herself inordinately at some household duty, Irene had found her fainting one day in their little sitting-room, and smitten with quick contrition, wrenched her thoughts from the past, striving as women do so heroically, to take up the thread of life when all interest in life seems done. A woman's heart breaks quickly, but that only ensures a double power of living.

Truly there was much to engage her attention, Malplaquet Place was a hopeless ruin and all its fields laid waste. The valuators had come and seen, and talked and gone their way. Their award being moderate enough, did not half cover the liabilities which were increasing day by day until Mr Gash gave the honest creditors to understand that Mr Neville's account books had been recovered, a statement which had no more foundation in fact than the claims they alleged.

It was wearisome work for the heart-sick girl, but she kept her attention fixed upon it for the sake of the lonely old woman by her side. Mr Gash too was equal to the emergency. It was he who opposed Irene's rash decision to sell Malplaquet and divide the proceeds amongst the horde, suggesting other plans, such as letting portions of the estate out as farms for which he exerted himself to get tenants, who on promise of protection were only too ready to agree to any rent; he too it was who rose as a tower of brass against the most clamorous creditors, and tore to airy fragments the tales of hardship with which they pursued the fatherless girl, and by an address worthy of Sheridan himself, appeased Messrs Sneem and Cobay with such arguments and such glowing pictures of the immediate future when Ireland's burdens would be shifted on England's philanthropic shoulders—those shoulders which have borne the property of others with so disinterested a patience—that they abated their claim,

and drew off with a few hundred in hand as earnest of the good time coming.

His visits were therefore frequent to Inistiogue, and though always on business matters, lengthened gradually, topics of other interest being broached, and ere long the friendless women came to expect his presence and his voice in the soft twilight of the early autumn evenings. He talked little about his purchases at New Ross, which they attributed to delicacy, instead, he spoke of other lands and times with a tact and knowledge that wooed the listeners' thoughts from the present, as such things are mercifully permitted to do, and never once did he speak too far or stay too long. On his own part, he took the purest delight he had ever found in the company of women, and under the subtle presence of better natures often caught himself wishing that those hours could have come at an earlier period in a life that was not altogether base.

Sometimes he sang at the piano graceful Irish airs, haunting, but sad with the sadness that seems to breathe from the hills and vales of beautiful Eire. And oftentimes as he rode slowly back along the Inistiogue road strange thoughts came to him, thoughts of a peaceful future, not in a distant land as he had hoped, but here in Ireland. Castlereagh had apparently forgotten his existence, the Hermitage was rebuilt and refurnished, what if—the thought was very sweet, and he encouraged it until it seemed a possibility, what if after all, the gods did sleep sometimes!

One day something happened sooner than he had anticipated. In the little garden attached to the house which Irene and her aunt rented was a bee-hive, and as honey was needed for one of those potions which Miss Prudence, who was a local Lady Bountiful, was fond of distilling, the ladies had endeavoured to make some necessary alterations in the positions of the hives. As Mr Gash was present he volunteered his services. They

had completed the arrangements, and Miss Prue had returned to the house in order to attend to the wants of a cottager's child, when Irene who was removing the white shawl in which she had enveloped her head, uttered a faint scream; she had been stung lightly in the throat. For a moment it seemed as if the accident might be serious, but Gash snatching the creature away, crushed it to death, and ere he knew it himself, had kissed the tiny red mark upon the creamy flesh, and all the ages that have come and gone, and all their painful wisdom could not have undone that second of time. He started back, his eyes fastened on her burning face which she averted.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive!" he murmured, "I should have known, I should have remembered!"

He faltered and stood there so abashed, so utterly unlike anything she could have imagined him becoming, that unreasoning pity touched her heart and stole into her face. A moment later he had taken her hand and was whispering into her ear.

"Irene," he said, stammering as he pronounced her name in her hearing for the second time, "as God is my judge, I love thee, and shall so love thee as the dearest thing the world holds for me. Listen, I have lived a hard life, perhaps a false one, false as the world I strove with, until the day I saw you first. Since that time you have been as a star whose remoteness could not forbid its sweet light from shining on my dark heart. Often have I lain awake planning how I might find favour in your eyes, and when the crash came, I welcomed it as the soldier the battle where he may win fame, for thus might I win you."

"And do you think that what has gone on here for many a day could win me or any woman?" she asked quietly.

"Those acts were not mine," he said breathlessly, "they were the acts of others over whom I had no con-

trol. My people can tell you how I have behaved since I became master of my own actions, though possibly it will not make me more popular with them than with those who control the government of this unhappy land."

She recollected now tales of Mr Gash's kindness and liberality in the matter of leases, concerning the drawing up of which he adopted a course to be followed with excellent results by the betrayer of the Sheares.

"I have no heart to give, sir," she said after a pause.

"You have the power to create a new one in me," he whispered passionately. "You have the strength to make me what my poor dull nature could never have risen to of itself. Think, I am not utterly bad, I long for pure and noble things, but, sweet lady, I have no tongue to bid me courage and but too many to bid me take the easier way. I was cast early into a world where each man plays for his own hand without a thought of right or wrong, where each flings his stake upon the table, and bides the issue with what heart he may, but never a pang for those who lose. Ambition beckoned me, folly lured me on, and I became as others until I saw you, and from that day my hope has been to stand where I stand to-day, at the door of your heart."

"My heart?" she said, with a heavy sigh.

"Yes," replied Gash, "so far have I dared to come; does it give me the right to hope? or," he added in a lower voice, "has that heart a lord?"

She started and flushed, the words touched her closely. "It has," she replied, "It owns the lordship of the dead."

Mr Gash concealed a smile bravely, the dead are not formidable rivals.

"I should not wish a nobler tomb than your heart, nor a longer eternity than your memory," he said.

She did not reply.

"Irene," he continued despairingly, "I love you better than life, better than aught this world can give me, with a love that could vanquish death and laugh upon poverty

or disgrace. I do not dare to hope for yours in return —yet. But I do ask the privilege of being your loyal friend, perhaps your husband."

She heard him patiently, looking down still. She thought on all he had done for them. From a worldly point of view it would be a wise marriage, and would assure the declining years of Miss Prue. It was not a time when women could afford to be fastidious in a country over-run with banditti.

"I cannot give you love in return," she reiterated, lifting her clear eyes to his impassioned ones.

"You can give me the next thing I most dearly prize in this world," he replied, "the right to protect you."

She said nothing further, but the ice was broken, and a week later the conversation was resumed, Irene having had an experience of what unprotected women, no matter what their position, had to expect, a sergeant and some privates having coolly broken into the house on pretence of searching for arms, and occupying the place despite all protest until the arrival of Mr Gash sent the self-invited guests slinking away to New Ross.

"Irene," he said, as they stood in the little garden again, "I am on the winning side, and therefore powerful, but I feel that I should curtail my visits here, to-day business will make a stir, if I apply for the punishment of those rascals, and your name will be bandied about among them. If I were your husband, how easy it would all be! Time can only prove the constancy of my love, will you not grant me the poor satisfaction of showing its purity, its depth, unrequited by aught save the name of husband?"

She bent her head; there were tears in her eyes, tears of helplessness.

"Think," he went on, "you cannot live thus, we can travel until this country has grown settled. The world is not full of sorrow, there is sunshine in other lands, there are scenes to make you forget the anguish of this. Ah,

Irene, how I should wish to stand at your side upon the ilex-bordered terrace of the Doria gardens, and see Rome at our feet! Your woes have been great, but she has known greater, and if you whisper them into her ear she will give you consolation. Come, say 'yes,' and together we will invoke the Nymph of Trevi, and forget what we cannot mend in watching the moonlight break upon her fountain!"

"I have no wish to fly from Ireland," said Irene, "the sorrow of her would come between me and the splendour of the world. My place is here, amongst my own people, and here I shall remain until some brighter day dawns for them. Which means," she added, with a pensive smile, "that I shall never quit Ireland."

"Well, be it so," he said, after a long pause, but in a graver tone, "I too am content to remain. Sooner or later, you must marry, you cannot live thus for ever, you will be the victim of a thousand cheats, and exposed to a thousand insults at which I shudder. Ah, Irene, do not tell me that all which has come and gone, the labour, the risk, the buffeting of those cross currents of Irish politics, the hate of the many, the envy of the few, have all been incurred in vain—since they have been incurred for you!"

She cast her eyes over the glorious unfamiliar scene, the rolling woods, the shining water, the peaked mountains framing all, as if to appeal to some invisible presence of which they were the home. It was not the glance of a young girl bidding farewell to the rosy present in the glow of a golden future, it was the hopeless look of a woman who knows what life is and has learned the lesson its knowledge brings. The past had vanished from her as if it had never been, the future could bring no joy to equal that which was lost. She did not think once of any possible duty she might owe the man at her side, any obligation she was undertaking, her own sorrow, her own disillusionment swallowed up all else, nothing mattered —only Malplaquet should be saved if possible, for it

had been her mother's, and then, there would be a home for Miss Prue.

She put her hand in his. "Be it as you wish," she said simply, "I trust that you shall not have leisure to repent."

By a powerful effort he restrained himself, and only kissed once, twice, thrice, the little hand ere he released it.

"God grant," he replied, with a genuine ring of earnestness in his tone, "that I may be able to bring some happiness into your life in return for that with which you have crowned mine."

And as they went into the house Mr Gash felt that he had won another move in the game of life.

CHAPTER XXXV

It was not a time which a coquet would have chosen for diffidence, the country was smoking in a bloody peace, detachments of the ninety thousand soldiers quartered here and there in every direction were an ever present danger to any woman who had not a husband's arm to defend her, for every patch of barley, every grove, every mountain glen and mountain top were being searched for the desperate relics of the patriot army which had three weeks in the open field kept English supremacy tottering in their county.

The Hermitage habitable again, was prepared as fast as circumstances would permit, and thither Mr Gash brought his bride, it being also arranged that Miss Prue who accompanied them, should take up the management of the place when her health was sufficiently re-established. Irene soon found that amongst her tenantry here, and at Malplaquet, were many who had known her former life, and going amongst the women of those down-trodden serfs, she cheered many a joyless home, and where money could not help, mingled her tears with theirs, until by her honest tenderness and pity she won without intending it, a toleration in their minds for Gash, who saw with perhaps a touch of shame, his wife accomplish in a few brief days more than he could hope to do in as many years. Then, suddenly, a detachment of the North Cork arrived with directions to quarter themselves at the Hermitage until further orders. They were under the command of Captain Thorncroft inordinately proud of his new rank, and were reinforced a few days later by some of the Camolins who immediately tried and

hanged two of the tenants for complicity in the late rebellion.

Mr Gash was obliged to forego any idea of buying them off, and instead, devoted his attention to watching over his property in order to save it from utter destruction at the hands of the rascally horde which the forethought of the Castle had thrust upon him in veiled reprisal for the transaction of Neville's vote.

Guessing this to be the reason, he did not weary Lord Carhampton with complaints, as Miss Prudence and Irene herself urged him to do, but having stored his most valuable possessions in the upper part of the house, with all the fire arms it contained, he made the best of an ugly situation.

It was not a pleasant household for the young wife to preside over. Downstairs the Blackpool rascallions held high revel with their women and the servant maids, living luxuriously on the newly stocked cellar, and incidentally doing what mischief came to their hands, while their officers dined with the family, and entertained the ladies by conversation of a light nature. This Gash bore as best he might, because he knew that a premature explosion would turn his guests into tormentors, but the latent menace in his eye and voice, and his reputation for skill with the sword his semi-military character enabled him to wear constantly, kept them on the inner verge of civility towards Miss Prue, and Irene, who often found Thorncroft eyeing her with an equivocal smile.

At length the situation grew so strained that she spoke to her husband about it, and was startled by a display of irritability which revealed at once his powerlessness and his suffering.

"'Sdeath, what's the use of telling me what I know already?" he cried. "Why are they here? Because—because I daresay I am not tyrant enough to suit them!"

Meanwhile, the lingering struggle for Irish freedom dragged on, until one day it was announced that the

French were at Killalla Bay, and for a while the dread of fresh fighting awed the ruffians into a more restrained demeanour. It was a time of couriers spurring to and fro over midnight Wexford, of messages, of rumours and of frenzied preparation. Now the French were marching inland, now they were at Ballina, now at Castlebar, and the infamous story of how six thousand fully equipped soldiers of his Britannic Majesty were running helter skelter before eight hundred Frenchmen still further increased the panic.

The world knows the almost incredible tale of Humbert's wonderful fighting march and its end, an end more glorious than Coote's fiasco in the Netherlands, and the news of it sent a wave of joy along the ranks of the British soldiery in Wexford, for now the dreaded French would be sent home, and nothing would stand between them and the wretched peasantry whom it was their mission to torture.

At the Hermitage the good news produced an orgie which lasted two days, and determined Irene on taking a step she had all along urged upon her brooding husband. She rode to New Ross, intending to lodge with one of her father's tenants, and remain there with Miss Prue, until the rabble occupying the Hermitage should be recalled.

She was welcomed as only a poor Irishman who has received a kindness, can welcome the kin of his benefactor, but to her astonishment, she learned that the very house in which she thought to stay had been examined on that morning by some gentlemen from Dublin who had come down on Lord Castlereagh's behalf.

"Gentlemen from Dublin?" said Irene, "the place belongs to my husband, he purchased it from me!"

"Oh then there must be a mistake, madam," replied Gilfillan, "an' it's glad I am that it's so, and that it has not gone out of the family. There's the gentleman yonder who was telling me all about it, a Mr Knox." And he pointed to a group of men at a little distance. Irene went up to them as they stood together talking.

"I understand that you are here on behalf of Lord Castlereagh?" she said, as soon as they had acknowledged her hesitating bow. "Are you aware that this portion is private property?"

"Pardon me, madam," replied one of the number, "we are instructed that it has been sold to him by a Mr Neville—of this county," he continued, consulting a note-book, "and we are here to survey and report to his Lordship."

"When was it sold?" asked Irene in a low voice.

The gentlemen spoke together. "Some weeks—er—months ago," replied the man who had been pointed out to her as Mr Knox, "by the agency of a Mr Gash, also of this county," he continued, with a slight smile, tapping his book with a gold pencil-case.

"I am Mr Neville's daughter," said Irene.

The men lifted their hats, and looked at one another again.

"Can you give me the exact date of the purchase?" she continued piteously.

"I—I do not exactly know," said one of the group, a gentleman by virtue of the kindly lie, "Lord Castlereagh was in treaty about it for some time," he added with an appealing glance at the others who smiled again.

"Then, the place must have been sold to him before the rebellion?" said the girl with a quivering lip, and a chill passed over her.

The man who had spoken first bowed. "Yes, madam, it was about that time I believe," he replied, "It certainly is his property now, but I make no doubt that he would sell it again, if you or anyone else chose to make an offer, for let us say — half the purchase money.

There was an air of significance, of half-humorous appreciation of some jest hidden from her, yet of whose character she could hardly fail to be ignorant, as the slight contempt of the tone showed. There was too, in

the manner of the others a conscious air of restraint; they were very much amused at something, but were obviously stifling its expression because of her presence.

A deep blush stole over her lovely face, the riding switch quivered in the little gauntleted hand.

"Perhaps, madam, if you felt any interest in the place, Lord Castlereagh might not refuse to make terms," said a quiet man in undress uniform. "Some formality might have been overlooked in the transfer," he continued, with an imperious glance at the others, "and if your interests have suffered in any way, his lordship, I am sure, would be the last in the world to perpetuate the injustice."

Irene caught at the words. "I thank you for the suggestion, sir," she answered, "it is quite possible. Formalities are likely to be overlooked in such cases now and then—it is quite possible." And with a few words of thanks, she turned away, blinded by scalding tears, and set out for the Hermitage.

What she thought of might have started a tear upon a demon's cheek. The way was not long, ten miles at most, but she did not note a single circumstance of the journey. One or two bands of yeomen met her, and although they yelled obscenity in her wake, they allowed her to pass them in silence, the despair upon the beautiful young face reaching their brutish brains.

Suddenly it seemed she woke out of a stupor, and found herself, not at the Hermitage, but staring upon the smoke-blackened ruins that had once been Malplaquet House. It did not seem strange that she should have ridden there, was she not going home?

She reined in her horse and looked around. Yes, yes, there was all the wreck, and it was not a dream. There was the portico, its broken pillars cumbering the steps before the yawning chasm where once the hospitable door had been. There too was the poignantly familiar outline of the garden, marking the right wing, and beyond, she could see across the riven walls, the orchard,

but they had cut down some of the trees, she wondered why.

She turned her horse's head, and rode straight through the riven house, wondering how she could do it, right on over the little mounds of rubbish between that formed a lane-like passage into the orchard. Yes, there was the rustic gate.—No, it was gone, someone had taken it away. Why did they do so? She felt a disproportionate sense of resentment. Her husband should be told. Great God! Her husband! The thought stung her so that she laughed aloud, but the laugh so startled her, that impelled by some impulse of forgotten ancestry, she made the sign of God's cross upon her forehead, and rode out by the laurel-bordered walk, round by the wall still encircling the roofless outhouses, and on, on, on, very gently, and humming a little tune.

The air had, she thought, grown colder, a wind from the north had arisen, and sent a tempest of yellow beech leaves whirling about her, so gilded by the light of the setting sun that she thought of guineas and laughed again at the conceit.

As she approached the Hermitage she heard the accustomed bruit that went up all day from the yard where some poor wretches had been tortured that morning, the garrison must have been out and brought fresh prisoners. Mechanically she sought the dining-room, intending to ask her husband what they had done with the gate, and as she came to the door she heard the murmur of voices.

"I know I ought to peep through the key-hole," she murmured, "since I am a lady no more, but I am too old to learn such tricks." And she knocked with the butt of her riding whip.

The door was flung open by her husband, whose bloodshot eyes had a fierce look in them; Thorncroft and two other officers, in full uniform were sprawling at the table littered by glasses, their booted legs splashed heavily with

mud. As if a signal they rose, Thorncroft addressing her a few words of civility of which she was barely conscious, all she noted was that they appeared to be in some intelligence with her husband. They then to her surprise, filed out of the room, the last man carrying his arm in a sling. When they were gone some instinct made her lock the door. Gash turned apprehensively at the sound and came towards her.

"You have the air of having ridden far," he said, "and the late rain has not improved those diabolical roads, I trust you are not wearied, for I have at last made arrangements to have you sent to Wexford or to Taghmon until this unbearable business is over. This is no place for you, Irene."

"I have been to New Ross to-day," replied the girl, walking over to where a chimney yet filled with ferns stood, and warming her hands at an imaginary flame. "You are a very imprudent man, sir."

"How?" said Gash, eyeing her curiously.

"How?" reiterated Irene. "Why, by buying that little place by the river-side from me, when my father had already sold it and his vote to Lord Castlereagh. We tricked you finely, sir." And she began to laugh.

Gash's face grew sharp, he took a step forward; he tried to speak, but no words came.

"I was looking at Malplaquet House to-day," she went on, "and rode over it—you could trace the plan of the place quite plainly. Dear God, 'twas like riding over one's grave! It is nevertheless an eligible site, well situated, outhouses somewhat out of repair. Ha! ha! But what of that? Quite fit for a gentleman's residence. Come, Mr Gash, broker, what will you bid?"

"Irene," said Gash quietly, "we may yet be glad to shelter ourselves in such a place."

"What will you bid?" she continued, disregarding the interruption. "Mr Lord Castlereagh would find it an admirable situation for docks, the agreeable air of

picturesque disorder should have a special attraction for him, being a symbol of what he has done for his country!"

Gash looked at the dry-eyed woman, and clutched his throat. Then, he went to her, and took one of the powerless little hands. It struck deadly cold through the gauntlet.

"Irene," he said, "for God's sake, do not look at me like that. Curse me if you will, but, let us not part thus!"

"Why did you do it?" she said simply, a flicker of her former self struggling into her face—"I was only a poor country maid, and you so clever!"

Mr Gash held his breath a moment, but the habit of falsehood was too strong. "I bought it because I wished to hide the truth from you," he said.

She smiled. "But, why did you not go to Lord Castlereagh and buy it from him," she answered, "they told me to-day he would sell it for half the purchase money?"

"I was but the agent," said Gash slowly.

"Liar! When was it sold? After the outbreak—when my father was killed! They told me as much, and could hardly restrain their laughter. I was quick to see. So you sell the dead man's vote, and cheat him in his grave, and his daughter in her bed!"

"The money is yours," said Gash, "every penny of it. I did it all for you."

"For me!" cried Irene, "under what hedge was I born, that I, the daughter of Walter Neville who never did a foul act in his life, should take the money for his vote which was never sold. Ha! Ha! For, did I not tell you the letter he wrote never went?"

"Irene," said Gash, his voice breaking in a sob, "recollect you are my wife!"

"Yes, yes," she answered, wrenching her hand away, and beating her breasts with it, "and there is no such

thing as insanity, for, though I remember it, I do not go mad! Yes! God in Heaven help me! I am your wife, and must bear your children!"

There was a peremptory knock at the door, the handle was turned.

"Irene," said Gash patiently, "look at me, judge if happy men wear my countenance."

She gazed at him coldly, attentively. The face was worn and seamed by premature wrinkles, there was even white hair upon the temples, the eyes, sunken and haggard looked into hers with an unconscious appeal that touched her, else she had not borne a woman's heart.

"You cannot understand," he went on, lifting his hand and bringing it down upon his sword-hilt, "how often I have felt tempted to do as Saul of old did!"

"Or Monsieur Vatel, the cook," she retorted, hardening again. "Suicide is not for you. But, why not travel? You might whisper your secret into the ear of midnight Rome, the shepherdess of Trevi might be amused. Or, you could carry it to the Bocca della Verita—the joke would dislocate its jaws, and never a liar's hand would it bite again for the sake of so excellent a jest."

The knocking was repeated.

"Listen to me!" cried Gash, stepping towards her as she recoiled with an awful look for a newly wedded man to see upon his wife's face. "You have called me liar, I am one. Coward too, mayhap, else.—Cheat, if you will! But, liar and coward and cheat to what degree I may be, believe this, that no man who ever gazed upon you loved you as I do! Aye, look the scorn you have the right to feel. Do not check the sneer; I am a beaten man, and it is the woman's privilege. Madly as I have loved you, falsely as I have won you, Hell itself cannot take from me the knowledge that I have won and worn you, and might have been worthy if——"

"Damnation," said a voice outside, "are you at Popish prayers that you won't open the door? Harrigan

is downstairs, he swears he must see you, he's in a white rage, but won't say what's afoot!"

"Irene," said Gash, advancing to the door, "If you will it, I shall never touch your hand again, but at least say that you will try to forgive, sometime, the cruel wrong, the infamy—though I cannot repent it even now? You leave this place to-night, such reparation as I can make you shall have—only say that you try to believe that I loved you—only a word!"

The handle was rattled impatiently, and throwing up his hand, he left her standing silent by the fireless hearth.

"Damnation! How white you look! One would think you had seen a ghost?" said Thorncroft, as they went down the passage.

"Or a devil," replied Gash, with an evil glance. "You are not an altogether bad man, Thorncroft, considering your instructions, but look at me, and know there is a Hell!"

"Talking about devils," answered Thorncroft uneasily, "Harrigan's one, if ever fiend came out of Hell. He's afraid, man—afraid of something—but he won't say a word! By the way, mum, about our prisoner, I put him in the room where we held the court-martial. Your lady is likely to go to-night?"

"Aye," answered Gash huskily, "you'll have him in Wexford by morning?"

"Yes, of course," replied the other. "We fear a rescue as soon as it is known. Ecod, 'twas pure luck, he was going to some place near Wexford to take ship for France with the devil, Tandy, that's what Harrigan said."

"Harrigan then knows?" said Gash.

"Not at all, but we met him this morning coming from Wexford, he's been in Dublin where he was after the old game of fooling the croppies, 'twas there he learned about Tandy. For your life, don't breathe a word of the capture—he'd be wanting his damned share, and it's little enough. God! 'twas a great piece of luck, our

catching him fording the Slaney as cool as you please —no attempt at concealment—he was coming from the direction of Malplaquet. He fought like a devil and killed three outright, for Pickering died just now. Well, it will look all the better in the report. But a thousand pounds, Gash! Od's life, I'm sorry for you. I hope Castlereagh will send us home—I told Knox who was over at New Ross, Ha! Ha! that we broke down two floors and the staircase, and set a barn on fire, he was delighted, the cur. I tell you there are a mort of things to do in Cork city with a thousand pounds. There's a damned nice little piece living near the Mansion House — but you were never in Cork? No! Well, you should come there. That's the place for pretty women, plenty of liquor, and plenty of sport when the shutters are up, eh? Though you've done very well yourself, for all—still, I'm sick of those cow-faced Wexford jades, their eyes are so cursed red. Mind, not a word to Harrigan about D—— we'll manage the rest quietly you may be sure!" And Thorncroft hurried away, thinking of the pretty daughter of a goldsmith who was honoured on the Exchange and kept a fine house existing to this day, not very far from the great House of the Mayors, and set a high price on his Lettie, whose brocaded skirts many and many a time brushed the oaken wainscotting of the hall—now smeared by the fingers of ragged generations—as she tripped down to the sedan chair, *en route* for ball or masquerade.

Gash pushed open the door of another room where Harrigan was striding to and fro, examining the decorations. As Gash entered, he spun round on his heel, all the evil of his nature concentrated in one swift glance.

"What a damned long time you were!" he said, "but, a newly married man must have allowances made for him, I daresay — cooing and billing like Philip and Mary on a shilling—eh? You appear to be pretty well off at any rate, cob-webs brushed away, gilded

cornices, ceiling restored—Laodamia watching her husband's ship. Ha! Ha! Good Gad, man, why you look quite old! How is that? Has the ancient tale come true?

> Non enim gazae neque consularis
> Summovet lictor miseros tumultus
> Mentis, et curas laqueata circum
> Tecta volantes.

Well—but why not give Care the slip in a brazen galley?"

"I prefer to remain where I am, there are many reasons," replied Gash.

"Aye, red-coated ones," sneered Harrigan. "'Slife, man, 'tis plain to be seen you're no better than a prisoner."

"Hush!" hissed the other, "I do not choose that they should see I know it."

"Hah, then it is useless to look for help from you," rejoined Harrigan. "I guessed how things were from Thorncroft's manner. But why don't you bribe 'em?"

"The money is wanted for other purposes," replied Gash shortly, with a faint suggestion of nobility in his look. "A man can but die once.—Where could I go, could I escape from myself?"

"Aha," laughed Harrigan. "Quis exul? Well, when you are my age you will have grown accustomed to yourself, my bucko, and bad as the company may be, 'tis better than a chaplain and Jack Ketch. I see Castlereagh's hand in all this; you choused him finely. But why did you stay in the cursed country, or why did you not discover some fresh plot and so make all right! Oh, but that is not what I came to speak about.—You must do something. Heathcote is here."

Gash looked at him sharply.

"He was not dead at all, you see," continued Harrigan, "and when he came to London he met a half-witted

chamber-maid who blabbed, but although we soon charmed her tongue, it set him on the watch. He saw the King, and all was put in train almost before we knew it, for I was in Ireland. They thought of attacking the coach, but the rogue had a guard with him, a guard like a prince. Oh, he's a great man entirely, empowered to do this, that and t'other—and he'll do 'em! As a last try, Nellie let him know you were married, but devil a bit it shook him as she wrote, and here he is now in Wexford town, straight from England!"

"How pat he comes!" said Gash, beating one hand softly against the other.

"Yes; it's like an actor's cue, curse me," answered Harrigan, showing his strong teeth in a terrible grin, "and it ruins everything for me. I never had such a chance! Perhaps you haven't heard I was abroad—Hamburg—Rochelle, so on, following every move of the plotting croppies, until I ran against Devereux one fine day in Boulogne—I sailed for England that night. The Castle would be glad to catch the rascal as Tone himself, and here he is now in Wexford! Think of it! In Wexford. A thousand guineas at the very least, walking about as cool as you please, after plenty of fighting up in Connaught! But better than that, there's Napper Tandy too, and the man who arrests him is the luckiest in boots this blessed day! Well, lookye, I had all this on information I picked up in Dublin, and curse the bit of use it is to me now, because of this English devil. I tell you they are here, quietly examining the resources of the country to prepare a report for the great expedition Tone is getting ready, for this affair t'other day is merely the advance-guard. Gash, they are in deadly earnest, and it might have been better to have stood on their side, they may succeed after all. These Frenchmen can fight! Lookye," he continued, tracing an imaginary map on the table, "here they are in Killalla

Bay, good: now they're here in Ballina, and by G—d here they are marching by the plans of a priest, one Conroy—I knew him—through miles of rain-flooded country to attack Castlebar! Only eight hundred of 'em, for I don't count the Connaught yahoos, marching, marching, marching for fifteen hours. A gun-carriage breaks down, pshaw, they bear it along on handspikes. The ammunition horses grow useless on account of the devilish rocks and passes they must skirt and follow. No matter, they haul it along in dashing style by hand, on, on, on to Castlebar, fresh and fasting on the top of the morning! Why, Lake wouldn't believe it—no wonder, poor angashore—it took the sight out of his eyes. He had six thousand, upon my soul he had, and he posted 'em round about Castlebar—plenty of cavalry to finish what his guns would begin—Carabineers, Light Dragoons, Jocelyn's Fox Hunters and so on. Bah, the French rush to the attack, drive in the outposts, are beaten back. No matter, at it again, ding-dong, turn Lake's cannon on himself, sound the *pas de charge*, and drive their cavalry down the main street of Castlebar, and the English run! The horse ride the foot down and so get ahead of 'em, and 'tis then the steeplechase begins! They're calling 'em the races of Castlebar in Dublin, and so they'll be known as long grass grows and water runs in Ireland. Sure, some of 'em didn't stop till they reached Athlone—ochone! I tell you what it is; I'm not a rich man, but I wouldn't take a hundred guineas to be one of 'em! I may yet die with French epaulets on my shoulders!"

"And the Cross of the Legion of Honour on your breast," rejoined the other.

Harrigan laughed, the light dying from his strenuous face. "Pshaw, this is romancing," he said. "But about this Heathcote, for a resolute man there is only one way left."

"Aye, a way which leads to Tyburn."

"Ecod, all roads lead thither," rejoined Harrigan.

"For aught we know, he might have warrants in his pocket. He could turn out the Wexford garrison this moment. That ass Thorncroft sent for a company of soldiers I hear, as if there weren't enough already about the damned place. 'Tis as like as not he'll come himself to know why."

"Aye, but what of the Government?" rejoined Gash, deadly pale.

"They are safe," grinned Harrigan. "Billy Pitt will take care of them, but for you and me——" The ruffian snapped his fingers.

"I had thought to sail," muttered Gash, more to himself than to the other, "but there were reasons."

"Oh, of course, a pretty woman is sometimes a devilish baggage," laughed Harrigan.

"Do not allude to Mrs Gash," said her husband, "or I shall kill you!"

"And why should I not?" sneered Harrigan, a red spot showing under each eye. "For my own part, I should be now a highly respectable member of society, with a remarkably fine wife whom you wot of, to keep me straight, but for this unlucky circumstance. Gad!" he added, looking more keenly at the pale desperate face before him, "you have played your game well, it's the talk of Dublin. But Castlereagh's a dangerous enemy—though he must have been swindled often."

"Aye, but if all goes to all, he'll find me a worse," swore Gash with a livid smile. "Robert Stewart's opinions were not always those held by my Lord Castlereagh. He changed his mind—like others—but he cannot change certain letters I know of."

"You are sure you did not write them yourself?" observed Harrigan, "you know there are some clever examples of your work in the archives of the Castle. It is a good idea to turn King's evidence, I had thought of that too, and we should both have pretty stories to tell, but would we be believed by our Dublin

friends, who would of course be on the jury? Who am I? One Stephen Harrigan. Och, that's enough, turn him off! Who are you? Philip Luttrell Gash, Esquire, a patrician cheat, but still a cheat. 'A spy of mine,' says Castlereagh. 'He has swindled me most damnably, upon my honour as a Peer!' 'Turn him off,' says the jury, "and you walk the hall. Oh, no, the shortest way with dissenters is the best!"

"What do you mean?" said Gash.

Harrigan lifted his hand and looked along the fork of the thumb.

"Give me the money you owe me," he said, "and I'll do it!"

"Not a guinea," hissed Gash. "If he comes, I shall have him at sword's length, as I had him before. I am his better."

Harrigan looked upon him with a murderous scowl. The other bent his brows. "So liberty is not worth a shot from behind a hedge?" he said. "Come! give me the word," he continued, "and I'll do it, and wad the bullet with this!" And he dashed down upon the table a woman's mitten. "You know who owns that; I found it in his pocket-book. If he should come here, think of his chances!"

Gash stepped back, and threw the door open. "If you do not go," he said, "I shall call the guard. There is such a place in this county as Scullabogue, and there are witnesses in this house of what occurred there!"

Harrigan laughed. "Strike me blind," he said, "if I understand your game, it's a deep one, I'll go bail. But understand this, if you attempt aught like what you hinted at, and if I dance to the chaplain's tune, you'll dance in my company!"

He shook his head once or twice as he spoke, and then with a snarl like that of an angry bull-dog, passed out of the room, and down the rambling corridor and out into the falling twilight.

Gash stood looking after him for a few moments with a frown which gradually relaxed as he heard the loud cackle of servant-maids' laughter from the yard where Thorncroft was singing—

> " 'Twas hay-making season, I can't tell the reason,
> Misfortune will never come single 'tis plain,
> But very soon after poor Kitty's disaster
> The devil a pitcher was sound in Coleraine ! "

"High spirits!" he muttered, "well, keep 'em, but I am not beaten, my Lord Castlereagh, I may give you a surprise yet. Now for pen, ink and paper, and a last fall with fortune. Sing away, half your rascals are bought over, and who knows, we march for Dublin this very night!"

Harrigan having cleared the Hermitage grounds, went on swiftly along the road to Wexford, his lips working, his brows contracted. "Scullabogue!" he muttered, "ecod, I thought they'd forgotten that. So this is the end of the game. 'Slife, I never saw so broken a man. Ah, Castlereagh is a bad enemy! Egad, Nellie, my jewel, 'twould be a bad lookout for me if I hadn't a friend in that same family; and as it is——" He looked over his shoulder. "Scullabogue!" he repeated. "Well devil take em 'all, I've a shot in the locker yet!"

He drew a pistol from his pocket and examined the priming. "I've the twin of ye, my darling," he whispered, putting it back in his pocket, "and if the worst comes, ye have two lives in your pretty mouths. Talk about warrants! Where's the writ can run with ye?"

He followed the irregular high-road for a while, until he came to a point whence he could see the country for some distance. Far away there was the twinkle of steel upon its shining length where the sunlight blazed redly in the frequent water-pools along the wheel ruts. "Hah, soldiers!" he muttered, "they are going to the Hermitage I suppose. What can they want there?" A chill passed

over him, he smiled. "Egad," he said, "perhaps I'd better avoid 'em."

The road on his left went straight to Wexford, the other branched off through somewhat difficult country, sure to be deserted. It would take him, he knew, to the town, or rather to a little fishing village on the estuary of the Slaney. A low roll of thunder rumbled softly through the evening air, the echo of a storm amid the Wicklow hills. He looked westward, heavy bars of dark tempest clouds were lying across the golden sky, detached masses of them sailing overhead, like flakes of flame. "'Twill be a bad night," he murmured, "but the better chance for me, the wind is off shore too. Pshaw, it won't break yet awhile."

With a careless glance at the Forth range, sun-smitten, piercing the eastern blue, he turned aside, and hastened down the winding way, the setting sun casting tremulous shadows of scarlet ash across his tortuous path, sycamore and beech making a twilight already in the places where it dipped.

"Patience, Steve, mo bouchal," he muttered, "it's not the first time you and your luck played the world, aye, and beat it. If I could only see Rosslare behind me this night I'd sleep easy."

At a turning he paused and looked back. "How quietly those soldiers are taking it!" he whispered. "I suppose they are waiting for someone."

His preoccupation prevented him from hearing the thud of horse hoofs just beyond a fence angle, falling dully on the grass-grown way, as an invisible rider came quickly on under the arching boughs.

The next instant he swung into sight. It was Heathcote. Their eyes had barely flashed recognition, when Harrigan, just as the horse came abreast of him, drew a pistol and fired point-blank, each separate part of the action, though lasting only the fraction of a second, being performed with a celerity and precision which were the last things Major Heathcote noted in this world.

A moment later he lay on his back, the sword he had drawn red in the blaze of a lance-like ray of sunlight that seemed as an angel's spear pointing to that scarlet deed. For perhaps a moment Harrigan stood quite still, reloading and listening lest there should be an orderly coming after the officer; but only the diminishing patter of the startled horse's hoofs broke the stillness.

Then he glanced at the yet living face with eyes astare that had seen Eternity, and struck by a prudent thought, went forward and rifled the pockets of the dead man, cutting rudely at sash and lapel until he came upon some letters and documents. "Hum, just as I thought," he murmured. "Stephen Harrigan, age so and so; height, hair, so forth. 'Slife, you're in luck, Steve Harrigan! Ha, a purse, only seven guineas and some silver; wisha, every little helps. Farewell, Englishman, your blow is returned. What a hell of a hurry you were in! I suppose you lost your way, and the soldiers were waiting for you. Well, by G—d, I put you on the straight one, and no mistake. Now, for Wexford and the open sea!"

And without another glance at the dead man, he darted forward on his shadowy path towards the blue strip of liberty shimmering clear beyond the roofs of Wexford town.

CHAPTER XXXVI

LEFT alone, Irene sat motionless in the low seat by the window where she had flung herself, gazing idly upon the littered table, the mud marks on the furniture, and all the other signs of the brutal occupation to which the house had been subjected. Sitting thus, her husband's character stood forth clearly, she saw him as he was, yet not by a one-sided light, but with much that went to palliate his faults; she gave him credit for good intentions, feeling that she should be generous with the thought that was slowly looming across her mental vision, she saw too how they had been frustrated, and for the first time she recognized fully the fact that the men who filled the house and flooded the stable-yard, had been quartered upon them as an insult and an injury by a swindled accomplice.

She recalled detail by detail the short history of Gash's lordship of the Hermitage, his evident desire to settle down, his determination to win the confidence and avert the hatred of his peasantry. She had seen how Thorncroft had openly—brutally thwarted those designs. She recalled the conversation at New Ross, the equivocal glances of the officers there, and as she remembered her cheeks flushed scarlet, and then grew deadly pale. A sense of suffocation came over her: up to this she might have been deaf and dumb, looking on at some fantastic show which spun and eddied round her, where masked faces blinked or leered, or openly mouthed at her with gibbering lips, now she had been made to both see and hear, but to what purpose?

She remembered and understood why Gash had proposed a trip abroad, until, as he said, the country would be

settled, and she smiled, recollecting how she had declared for remaining as it was their duty to the hunted people—there would be time enough for travelling afterwards she had told him—and her appreciation of the hidden jest was keen.

Next, the soldiers had come. It made her remember how two of the peasants who had returned to work on the promise of protection had been hanged from a tree on the lawn, and how the wife of one had reeled into her presence and invoked the aid she could not give. She deliberately held the awful picture before her, the screaming woman staggering with uplifted arms towards Gash, the terrible words she uttered, and his more terrible face listening to them.

"Play-actor!" she screamed, "yer hands are tied, and ye can't help anybody now—not even yerself!"

The wail sounded faintly in her ears, ringing home the convincing truth. Her husband was a prisoner, held one by a cunningly devised system, the executioner of the very people he had wished to placate, and Thorncroft was the gaoler.

It was a long, deep reverie, but every thought was clear as noonday, every conclusion as inevitable as death. This tortured, smiling ghost haunting the corridors, or listening with pale lips to the badinage of the yeomen was not the man she married. Who was he then? What had he done? Why was this mountebank, Thorncroft, master of the house so that barely her sleeping chamber was free from his intrusion?

Footsteps sounded outside, and Miss Prue looked in timidly, but Irene sat still as the carved faces on the mantel-piece, and she went out. She too had done her part in this accursed marriage, but it had been for the best, and a quick regret softened the bitterness of the thought.

She glanced round in the failing light, and took up a little volume of poems Thorncroft had been yawning

over that morning, it was valuable in its way, being some of those saved from Malplaquet House, and she had intended to secrete it upstairs. She unclasped it idly, between two pages was a piece of paper in Heathcote's handwriting, she spread it abroad and read the few verses copied there—

"Tell men of high condition
That rule affairs of state.
Their purpose is ambition,
Their practice only hate.
And if they once reply
Then, give them all the lie.

"Tell them that brave it most,
They beg for more by spending
Who in their greatest cost,
Seek nothing but commending.
And if they make reply
Then give them all the lie.

"Tell zeal it lacks devotion,
Tell love it is but lust,
Tell time it is but motion,
Tell flesh it is but dust;
And wish them not reply
For thou must give the lie."

Ah, how true it was—all lies, lies, lies! That was Heathcote's hand, he must have written it the morning he had talked to her about the roses. Was he dead? Would he ever return to Ireland? Why had he not finished copying the poem? Probably he was called away by Phyllis, and there it was, just as clean and fresh as if nothing had happened; the stout walls, the polished floors, the gilded ceilings, were all nothingness now, and this handful of leaves had lived through all the wreck and havoc with not a stain upon them, though Walter Neville's name was written on the title-page, and his place knew

him no more! The preservation of the senseless thing hurt her, it seemed a treachery, and she flung it aside.

The half sheet of note-paper fluttering to the floor reminded her that Fanny Gore had come back and had written to her a few days before, she had not visited her though—it was well done, it showed breeding. It was kind for Fan to be a lady. But after all, what did it all matter? She knew that she should have wept, but she had no tears, and sat on there, duped, cajoled, harried to madness, the daughter of a fool—the wife of a liar. She bit her lips fiercely as she stared pitilessly at the picture she conjured up, and beat her riding switch sullenly to and fro, as she were keeping time to some inaudible words singing within her. Yes, the dishonoured wife of a disgraced cheat who could not even protect her from insult—but even then the figure of Gash with uplifted arm leaped before her imagination, and again she had a glimpse of Plornish sprawling at his feet. Oh, but he was not the same man now! She beat the thought out with the whip, and it seemed as if she was beating her own face—the dishonoured wife of a disgraced man.

Suddenly the door swung open, and Thorncroft reeled in. He cursed on finding the room in twilight, and spun round to roar an order to the servants who were at his beck, but his eye caught the steely glint in Irene's and he stopped. He was not very drunk, nor in the half bantering, half irritable mood which had hung so oddly on him since he came back to the Hermitage, and as he bowed she recollected that he had controlled on more than one occasion the conversation of his comrades, over whom he had but slight authority, and had shown her other attentions which although only the barest civility under normal circumstances, she had learned to estimate at their proper value, she recognised too that in some way he had been the only barrier between her and open insult.

"Sitting there all alone, like Patience on a monument, smiling at grief," said Thorncroft, making a leg, "upon

my soul, Mrs Gash, I never could understand what Patience wanted on a monument."

"It seems to me the most appropriate place in the world for her, sir," said Irene, rising.

"But what's the necessity for being patient with the dead?" continued Thorncroft, "it's patience with the living we want, sink me! Unless, indeed, it had been that Patience herself raised the monument to some spark she thought dead, but wasn't, and it might have been that she sat there to watch him heave up the stone. Ha! ha!"

Irene looked steadily at him, the face was not evil, not even mean, but the eyes might have been more respectful. There was an intermittent good humour about the man, for which she felt grateful. She had often caught him looking at her as he was looking now, and it seemed that there had always been a suggestion of pity in his regard. He came nearer.

"You are right, we want patience with the living," she said.

"Yes, and the living want patience too—your husband wants it, and so do I."

"Indeed," said Irene, "why?"

"For two very different reasons," replied the other, "but, Od's life, I won't tell! I was reading in a book here t'other day written by some old crack, that the Electress Sophia not only wanted to know the 'whys' of things, but the 'whys' of the 'whys'—which was damned silly. Because, if you went whying like that, you'd proceed *ad infinitum* and run your head against a stone wall, and be sorry for it. 'Why is hubby sad?' says you. 'Because he's in a—hic—quandary,' says reason. 'And why is he in a quandary?' says you, back again. 'Oh, that's the point of the joke,' says reason, 'that's for you to find out.' Ha! ha! 'Why am I going to Taghmon to-night?' says you—by the way, your garr—horse, is saddled—'Because hubby would be

embarrassed if I stay,' says reason. 'And why would hubby be embarrassed?' says you, like a woman of spirit. 'Oh, that's another story,' says reason, 'and it is better for women not to ask *too* many questions. So run away and play.'"

"You seem to have made a study of the sex!" said Irene wearily, gauging with experienced eye the exact amount of drink he had taken.

"I—hic—did," replied Thorncroft, "I've a way with 'em, but since I saw one woman, I foreswore all others—unless as make-weights," he added with tipsy conscientiousness, "and upon my soul I pity that woman!"

"For being the object of your attachment?" said Irene. "Perhaps you exaggerate, the poor maid may not find it insupportable—every woman is not a Semele."

"Oh, ecod, that's good," laughed Thorncroft, "it reminds me of the Latin about similimus similantibus congregantur, and so forth. But she's not a maid, she's a wife."

Irene beat the switch on the palm of her hand.

"She is," said Thorncroft deliberately, "the finest woman I ever set eyes on. She's married to the damndest cur—and she's beginning to find it out."

The smile on Irene's face was not pleasant to see.

"Now," continued Thorncroft, his head to one side, his arm akimbo, "when I saw this I said to myself, Chris, my lad, don't obey orders *too* closely—they selected you for the duty because they thought that as you were in the North Cork you were a blackguard—but you're not, you know, and you wouldn't be here at all, only, curse it, you have your way to make. The girl's a lady; don't make her life too hard, and she may come in time to look kindly at you, man, when the cur of a husband is under the daisies, or over the sea."

"What considerate affection!" said Irene.

"Oh, it's not affection, it's passion!" said Thorncroft thickly, resting his hand on the back of one of the chairs,

and staring steadily at her. "There's a difference between love and affection—all the difference in the world!"

"You are most precise, sir," rejoined Irene, moving a little aside. "You do not require a dictionary in prosecuting your suit, and I wish you all the success compatible with your merits."

"Do you?" cried Thorncroft. "Why, that's the way!" And ere she could guess his intention, he had kissed her.

With a sharp cry she sprang back, and slashed the whip across his face—partially defended by his uplifted arm.

He reeled back also, half-sobered, glaring at her, his eye evil, his cheek livid; yet he did not strike her—a fact to his credit, since he wore a scarlet coat.

"Your father gave me a drink of wine when I wanted it badly," he said, "else you'd pay for this."

"You dog! You kennel cur! Stand out of the way!" she cried, terrible in her panting despair. "Stand out of the way, or I shall cut the cur's heart out of you!"

"You had better take care," rejoined Thorncroft, fingering his cheek. "You don't know to whom you are talking; you don't know who I am—you don't know what your husband is."

The whip writhed in the maddened woman's hand.

"My husband!" she muttered.

"Yes!" replied Thorncroft with an oath. "I suppose you don't know how he got the money that rebuilt this shanderadan, and stocked the farms? How devilish innocent you are! Don't you know how he diddled Castlereagh about old Neville's vote—nicked him out of a tidy sum? Oh no, you're the man's daughter—married to the thief! Ecod, there's nothing like innocence!"

Irene smiled.

"No wonder you smile," continued Thorncroft, "I am not a bit surprised, the only puzzle is how you kept it up so long. Why, it's the standing joke of Crow Street and Smock Alley, and all round Dublin—Castlereagh's bargain.

Well, I'm here to pay him and you back, and I'll do it henceforward. So you'd best be civil. 'Slife, woman, who are you at all?"

"Phil Gash's wife!" replied Irene, making a curtsy.

"Aye, by G—d!" cried Thorncroft, "and I'll wager my life he cozened you into it. He did! So now's your time for revenge!"

He took a step nearer, Irene lifted the switch.

"Drop the playactin'!" he hissed, "I've known your betters, merchants' daughters, sink me! Fine women, the Gooldes and the Coppingers, and the Galways and the Skid—Skid—Skiddies! They wouldn't say 'no' to Chris Thorncroft at the balls in the Mansion House!"

Irene laughed bitterly. "Then go back to your 'baffetty' ladies squatting behind their counters," she cried, "but if you dare to touch me, your face shall have the stripes your base shoulders should have had if my father lived."

Thorncroft recoiled. "Baffetty!" he repeated weakly, with drunken pathos. "How cursed proud you are! Looking down on honest women! And what shall I say about your 'baffetty' croppy spark, that's tied up safe and airy in the room beyond the corridor? Devereux, the French captain—the bloodiest-minded ruffian in all Wexford! Aye, open your eyes! There's a pretty married woman for you! Where's your modesty now? You suppose I don't know your tricks; didn't I see you loading an' ramming every charge for that little gun every time he'd sight it, up in New Ross, like a Trojan? But I never said a word because I wouldn't get a woman into trouble. But I'm not a fool, and I'm as good a man as Devereux. Ha! ha! You thought he was dead, I'd swear?"

A hand knocked quickly at the door, then the handle was turned, and a man looked in.

"What the devil do you want?" roared Thorncroft.

"Captain," shouted the other, "a messenger has just

come in to say you're wanted, a gentleman has just been shot on the Wexford road!"

"What's that to me?" hiccoughed Thorncroft.

The other advanced a few paces, and said something in a low voice. The yeoman started, swore, and then, without a word to Irene, who remained an absolutely indifferent spectator, rushed from the room.

When he had gone her lethargy fell from her, and, catching up her skirts, she fled into the corridor, and mounted to the chamber adjoining her room where Gash had stored the few valuables he had been able to bring there directly the character of his guests had become apparent. She knew that he had there a chest from which he used to take money for household expenses, but she thought of this only a moment. Weapons were there too, disposed around the walls as trophies, but the firearms were under lock and key. Amongst the former was a dagger of somewhat unusual shape, which she rapidly detached and unsheathed. Its blade had been worked into a wavy line of steel, showing on both sides the whiteness of an edge, and she could see that the point was keen. She never dreamt of doubting Thorncroft's words, it was all as it should be, her husband a liar, she a dupe. She was hardly angry, it was too late for that now. The episode of the epaulet was only another incident in the squalid farce of which she had been the victim. Instead, she felt a distinct sense of resentment against her father for having died so soon; it was no way to leave his daughter, she thought. A design for getting her lover away crossed her mind once or twice, but she could not follow it out, she was incapable of planning anything, or of keeping her mind on any idea, save to see him, to tell him that she would have gone with him to death that night in New Ross if only he had said the word. Ah, if they had died then, how much better it would have been —not a very original thought surely.

A muffled thunder-peal rolled dully round the western

horizon, and rumbled softly away into silence beneath the sighing of the Hermitage thickets, and the tinkling impact of crisp, dried leaves whirling against the casement; Mount Leinster was taking up the tale of the storm.

Her manner must have been normal, for Miss Prudence, who had just come into the room, merely asked if she was going out again, and she replied in the affirmative. The elder woman then remarked on the early twilight, and, saying that it was chilly, went downstairs for lights, the ladies having learned to wait upon themselves in their own house. When she departed the girl went to a decanter and poured some whisky into a flask which she thrust into her bosom, next she unlocked a little cabinet, and with feverish haste took from their cases some jewels, a necklace which she clasped about her neck, and diamond pendants she placed in her ears, wondering to find them so hot. "Someone is talking about me," she murmured, "perhaps my mother, telling God." There were some rings too, set in antique fashion, and she would have put them on, but the sight of her wedding one and the shrinking dread lest they should touch it, deterred her. She would do without rings for the time left. Most of those things had belonged to her dead mother, and had escaped the general ruin owing to the fact that they had been in a Dublin bank as security for a small loan. She had liked them all very much, and had been properly proud of them too, especially the necklace, but still, if the soldiers liked to have it, what matter? It was only then she regretted not having money to offer them.

The dagger was not a small weapon, but she hid it easily under her riding jacket. She was quite ready to go now, but instinctively turned to the glass hanging opposite her bed, the reflection made her laugh, and then check the laughter with fear in her bright eyes. Stay, perhaps she was dreaming? Perhaps Heathcote and her father and Miss Prue were waiting downstairs now? How

surprised they would be when they came up and found the room empty and learned that she was over the sea with her croppy lover. Old Nancy could tell them, she was such a splendid liar, but no, she would not have her say anything, only they could find it all out, and her father would surely forgive them when he knew.

Again with that sudden rallying of reason she paused, the terror in her eyes answering from the mirror. She drew out the dagger, and held the blade close to her face in the failing light. Ah, there was the maker's name, Byrne of Castle Street, Dublin. She wondered what manner of man he was, and whether he had daughters, and if they were deceived into marrying the wrong man by lies. It was a mean trick—so paltry—to take all a girl has to give, by deceit, and when there were so many girls in the world, she wondered how men could do it.

She thought of Arretia and wondered if it were difficult to kill oneself; only she had a straight dagger, all the engravings said so, and this was curved. Perhaps he would do it when he knew. She thrust the weapon into its place and hastened downstairs.

Once outside, she stood irresolute, Thorncroft had said Devereux was in the house, but where? It must be in the room looking on the garden, he had jerked his thumb over his shoulder, pointing in that direction. She made her way into the lawn, its shrubbery now clipped and pruned into fantastic shapes, and passed along the front of the building whose windows were lit here and there, hearing laughter from the breakfast parlour. She was soon close to the old tower and the privet-bordered garden flanking it; the hedge being cut now, she could see across the velvet sward where autumn anemones were blowing, the door of the low entrance to the winding stair which Gash had shown her on their first arrival, as a curiosity. It was to have been removed, but as she

thought the effect of the ivy covering it pretty, he had allowed it to remain.

Again, her thoughts slipped away to a drawing of that very portion of the grounds which she had made. It had pleased her husband very much, he really had a cultured taste for the fine arts, though a cheat and a liar. She regretted that it was not quite finished, for it was good. At the same moment cross belts showed past the angle of the tower, as a man with musket and fixed bayonet took a lazy turn across the lawn, the evening breeze bringing her a whiff of tobacco.

She smiled, opened the wicket, closed it and went towards him. At the sound of the footfall he wheeled round, and recognising her, challenged perfunctorily.

"You keep good watch?" she said in a tone strange to her own ear.

"Aye, and have to, madam," replied the man, who belonged to the Camolins and had been of Gore's troop. He had shown her civility on more than one occasion, but now he did not think it necessary to remove his pipe.

"You have a famous prisoner?" said Irene coming closer.

"Aye," responded the fellow, grounding his musket. "But safe and tight in that room above. It's a thousand pounds to Captain Thorncroft of the North Cork, though 'tis we did the fighting, two of us was killed."

Irene looked at the door. "I should so much like to see him!" she said.

"Well, he ain't much for a woman to look at," replied the man, "because his uniform is all tore, and he fell in the mud when his horse was shot. You can see him when they are taking him away," he continued, "they sent on to Wexford for a captain and some men, but they are over long in coming. He's a great man among the croppies, so we must guard him careful."

"Certainly," replied Irene, "but, he cannot escape, is

not the place guarded well on the other side?" she added, with a flash of hope.

"Yes, there are a good many of 'em there and in the corridors," answered the sentinel, changing his feet and eyeing her curiously.

Irene smiled, and took the liquid light of the gems slowly from her ears, a faint patter of rain-drops whispered on the leaded window panes, a sharper roll of thunder reverberated on the right, the Forth Mountains were answering Slieve Kielter. Irene advanced, and held them out silently.

"I daren't," said the fellow, in a tone which showed he dared and at no great risk either.

Irene smiled, and his hand closed on the jewels.

"Miss Gore wrote to me, she intends making some changes amongst her tenantry, and I shall speak about you, Grebel," the girl observed—"if I see her," she added, for it would be a base thing to tell a lie now.

The man thanked her. "But neither Miss Gore nor anyone else could do anything for me if aught happened," he remarked. "It's a thousand pounds matter, and I have twenty rounds of cartridge. It's only to have a peep at the croppy, you know?"

Irene nodded.

"Very well, there is a door up yonder," he continued, pushing back the postern entrance, "it's at the top of the steps, but it's locked, at least it was when they changed guard, but the lieutenant and Captain Thorncroft says it's a trick door—more like it's boarded over. Howsomever, that's your business, lady."

"I understand, and thank you, Grebel," replied Irene. The man stood aside, she slipped by him, pushed the ivy-hinged door aside, stole up the stairs and found the door. At it she listened intently a moment hearing dully the sound of laughter, and the clatter of boot heels from the corridor beyond, but inside, close at hand, she heard a voice singing—

"Charmante Gabrielle!
Percé de mille dards,
Quand la gloire m'appelle
Sous le drapeau de Mars—
Ah cruelle departie, malheureux jour.
Que ne suis-je sans vie ou sans amour!"

She nodded to herself, as she fumbled with the hasp controlling the mechanism Gash had had repaired. That was the way a gentleman should die, she thought, with a song on his lip and courage in his heart. She felt proud of him—so unlike Gash. She wondered what he would say—and the door rose.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SHE pushed aside the tapestry and entered. The singing paused suddenly; she made an imperious gesture, and the song was taken up again with a short laugh of comprehension. She flitted over to where he lay bound, as he had been thrown, in a corner against a settle, and quickly cut the ropes asunder. Still singing at intervals, but in a minor key, with a certain bitter ictus on the gay words, he took the dagger from her and as soon as practical, cut himself loose, rose to his feet and laughed softly.

She stood before him looking into his dim face, open-eyed, then she proffered the flask, and he drank eagerly, pouring a little on his wrists, he rubbed them with the fiery spirit, silent now, holding the dagger between his teeth. He laughed softly again and resumed the song, the weapon in his hand. She stood close to him, looking into his eyes. He had grown older she thought—more reckless. His stealthy movements were abrupt, it seemed as if he were instinct with some pent-up energy which might at any moment break into violent action. Only one word could describe him she decided, that word was "dangerous." It would cost lives to take him alive.

He was clad in the torn blue of a splendid uniform, but soiled with blood and mire.

"There is a hidden door yonder," he said. "Where does it lead to?"

"Down to the garden, and the front of the house," she whispered. "Oh Frank, don't you know me?"

"Aye, thoroughly," he replied, stooping to feel an ankle through his boot, "you are Phil Gash's wife! But this is

a good turn, and a weapon, for both I thank you. Your friends will never hang me now. Is there anyone on guard below?"

"A single man," she replied, "but he has twenty rounds of ammunition in his pouch."

He laughed. "Single men are lucky," he said, "I shall save him the trouble of firing them. It must be that way, it's easiest. He let you in I daresay, and he will let you out too. Keep him in conversation a moment, I'll strike him down, gag and pinion him with those ropes; then I shall be off—where are the stables?"

His manner was so strange that she followed him about the room as he moved softly to and fro, stretching his limbs, the laughter of the guard and the thud of musket butts echoing from the corridor.

"The stables are to the left," she said.

"Good," he muttered, "once there I shall not trouble you further. I have business and must set about it. There is no other prisoner?"

She shook her head, and put her hand upon his arm. He looked at her sharply in the dusk.

"Will you not kill me before you go?" she whispered with a child's unreasoning agony in her eyes. A flash of vivid blue glimmered outside.

"Irene," he said. She pressed close to his side.

"Oh, how can you be cruel?" she sobbed. "Is it not hard enough to bear?"

"It was your own act, I heard nothing to the contrary."

"Yes," she replied, "but oh, you do not know how foully it was done. They told me you were dead."

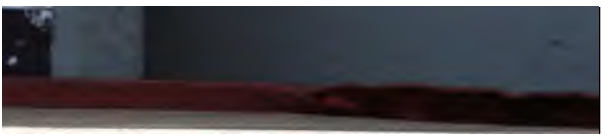
He smiled.

"Killed in Wicklow," she continued.

He gazed at her, his head to one side, the point of the dagger between the finger and thumb of the left hand.

"A few months ago," he said, "it was a long time to mourn."

"You do not understand," she sobbed, covering her



face with her hands. He bent his brows, and so contracted, lifting them regarded her curiously. "'Slife," he said, "you were as simple as a maid in a ballad. And so you have suffered too?"

"Beyond the power of words to tell!" she answered, and he believed her. Then, he drew her to him, and she told him all.

"The cur!" he muttered, "the cur! Oh little brown head, oh lovely bosom, oh sweetest flesh of sweetest woman God ever made in Ireland—all his! From the crown of the head to the sole of the foot."

Involuntarily he slipped into his country's tongue, which he was not ashamed to speak, nor she to understand, and poured out in it the pent-up sorrow of his spirit and the love of his heart.

"Betrayed!" she sobbed, "and through my fault—mine alone. What is there left to us?"

"Honour," he answered, and he kissed the little hands reverentially.

The noise in the passage outside and on the stairs suddenly dwindled down. Irene caught the tones of her husband's voice, imperious and cheerful, more like his old manner than she had known for many a day. There was the clink of metal, growling expostulation, crossed by high, confident tones.

"Do you dare deny it is Captain Thorncroft's writing?" they heard him say. "Open the door at once, and see that you keep better guard, else your master and his, Major Heathcote, shall hear of it."

The door creaked. With a despairing gesture the girl fled behind the secret niche, and drew the tapestry in place. Devereux stepped back to the table and sat down, the dagger in his hand. The door swung open, and Gash entered, a flood of light veering before him from a lantern he carried. It rumbled to with a bang, and advancing to the table, he placed the lamp there. He was booted and as he moved spurs jingled, his coat was buttoned to the

chin, over his arm he bore a cloak; the light caught his sword hilt and a finger's breadth of the steel above the scabbard as he moved with short, decided gestures. What was seen of his face under the brim of his hat was white and set.

Devereux rose quietly as the door closed, and the two men regarded one another attentively. In the distance a clock told the hour.

"Hah," said Gash quickly, "you are unbound, that is well. It is more simple. I have come," he continued, "to make a proposition, and as time presses, I ask your attention. You have known me as an enemy, Captain Devereux, this evening I come as a friend. You were on your way to a place not far from this, which you know, where a certain ship is waiting to convey you to France, and also one of the most daring foes of England, Tandy, who is concealed here. You know his hiding-place; tell me of it—the merest hint will suffice—and you may go at once. There are horses ready, and I myself shall be your escort. See," he went on, "there is a passport signed by Lord Carhampton's name!" And he flung a paper on the table. "Read it over carefully. As for the rest, there is an *escalier derobé* from this very room and only one man on guard, it's but a pass of the steel and all is done. Then, you will have a horse and arms and be free to find the ship. I shall march with a small force, arrest Tandy, and take him, upon my honour, straight to Dublin. You need not bestow a thought on him, the man is clever enough to get himself out of worse scrapes, and you will have the satisfaction having nicked the ass, Thorncroft, out of a thousand pounds, come, decide quickly, you see I shall trust to your honour. Throw this cloak over your uniform."

"And the alternative?" said Devereux.

"Within perhaps half an hour you will be under guard for Wexford, where to-morrow's sun will see you dangling from a gibbet. The game is played out here; there will

be no rescue, you know there is not the ghost of a chance otherwise."

"Gash," said Devereux, with strange quietude, "every man judges others by himself. It is the commonplace vice of rascals to do so, and considering those with whom you have been in habits, it is but natural. Some years ago you forged a certain great man's name, you were detected, by a brother rogue, the Sham Squire. Had Beresford known you would have been prosecuted despite your family connections, but guessing your—Ha! ha!—worth, the crime was condoned, provided you would devote your tongue and your talents to the cause of Union. You recollect you had once held popular opinions. How well you and your kind have done their cursed work this bleeding land can tell. You have achieved success, but being once a man of honour, you will believe me when I say that standing here a prisoner, with the noose dangling above my head and the love of life in my heart, I would not change with you."

"No," said Gash calmly, "had you been in my place you would be exactly what you are now, an outcast, only perhaps a little more violent in praise of honesty. I trod a dangerous path, it required some address."

"You are welcome to all the praise you can garner from the address you displayed," rejoined Devereux, "the assassin and the thief are not beyond feeling the charm of personal pride."

Gash laughed.

"Aye, you may well laugh," rejoined the soldier, "for you have won. Crow Street may be proud of her apprentice!"

"Come," said Gash impatiently, "heroics aside, will you take my offer? I have my own reasons for wishing to do you this good office, though, upon my soul, gratitude is not one of them. Let me know where Tandy is, my friends will march for the spot, and you shall have saved your neck and your credit!"

"How dare you talk to me of credit!" said Devereux in the thick tones of rage. "I am a gentleman, and here I stand alone against you and your kind, though ye numbered the wide world. The star of honour has lit me through my life and shall shine upon my grave, I shall go with serene front to meet the men and women of my race, unshamed if defeated, for defeat is the guerdon of honesty here and now. But beyond, when the books are opened and the judgment reversed, ah, who can tell?"

"Ah, indeed, who can?" answered Gash, though his cheek was dark. "Those are fine sentiments, Captain Devereux, but a man has to pay a sharp price for them in Ireland. Perhaps you would be willing to dance on 'em to-morrow when the cart is pulled from under you."

"Death has been before me for many a day," replied Devereux bitterly, "and the death of a hunted animal, but I never flinched. Do you think, you cheat, that I would buy my life now by consorting with such as you?"

Gash laughed and ground his boot heel on the floor. "No doubt," he said, "there is a disparity. The son of a base-born peasant who could neither read nor write——"

"Yes," cried Devereux, in a voice suddenly rising above that in which the preceding conversation had been carried on, "but still the son of a gentleman who scorned to sell his faith or his country. Who with unshaken eye saw the stranger in his lands and the hare couch upon his hearth-stone. Yes, there is a difference between the son of such a man and Luttrell's bastard!"

It is probable that the room never echoed so fierce a cry as that which drowned Devereux's last words; Gash drew his sword. But his foe was prepared, and the next instant the light was dashed out. Before it had crashed at their feet Irene leaped impulsively from her place of concealment. What her intention was she could not tell, and ere another second passed, was not solicitous, for a sharp pain rent her body, and something struck her

heavily beneath the breasts, the hilt of her husband's sword.

So swiftly did all occur that the lantern had not ceased rolling across the boards when she lay fainting there. A broad band of light flashed into the room, as the door crashed back, and showed Gash what he had done.

There was no time for talk, a yeoman seeing Devereux erect, fired, and the bullet took effect, but with a thunderous shout the soldier rushed to the attack struck by another ball fired from the head of the secret stair where Grebel had come; the man who had fired first reeling back, horridly ripped by an upper cut of the dagger. Another, one of the Camolins, drew his sabre, and slashed at the prisoner, but the blow was parried with a celerity of which he never had experience, and his throat slit as Devereux hurled him against the door-post. A moment later the soldier had the sword in his hand and his feet on the corridor. There was plenty of light now, and they fired at him, shortening their muskets, and crowding along the passage with fixed bayonets. But, conscious that his life was going fast, he dashed at the levelled steel, sliced one man through stock and neck with so furious a blow that the living head fell over on the shoulder, held by a fragment of flesh alone; then, as the next recoiled in human horror from the sight, the dying swordsman feinted with terrible cunning, and clove him to the very teeth, and so hacking right and left, fought on across the corridor and out to the landing, where he sank amid his yelping foes.

Grebel having reloaded, stole cautiously forward, and looked out. Some of the balustrade rails had been torn bodily away, the place was slippery with blood pattering down upon the lower flights like the rain on summer leaves, crimson figures writhed in a broken line to the threshold of the strong room opposite where old Luttrell kept his plate, and the light flamed on the glorious

blood-stained patch of blue that showed where the soldier of Ireland fell.

"Stand back, curse you, ye bungling cowards!" cried an irritable voice, and Thorncroft's shako glistening with rain, appeared on the stairs while he paused to have a broken-necked soldier removed. "Ho, yonder! Don't fire on a down man! Hah," he continued, as he ran up to the landing and stood there staring ruefully at the haughty face of the dead. "All over, damn me. Here, take 'em away. Game to the gills by G—d!"

"Help here," cried Gash's voice, "there is a lady hurt. Bring lights."

Thorncroft snatched a candelabra from a yeoman, and picking his way over the dead bodies, entered the room where strands of smoke were floating heavily.

"Go down and tell the women," he said, turning to Grebel. "'Slife, she's spitted through whale-bone and all! Here, Gash, take you one of the muskets, and I'll take another. We'll put her on 'em. Easy now—No, pon my word, I'll keep my hands off her!"

They bore her thus from the room to another where Miss Prudence received them, speechless with sorrow. There were no doctors available, but had there been a dozen present, it would not have altered the event, her life was ebbing surely and swiftly. After a time she opened her eyes, and Miss Prudence asked her how she did.

"Well—well," she replied.

The beautiful eyes closed again, the kind shadow of Death's wing stole over the face very gently; the blood was sinking from under the skin, leaving a marble peace behind.

Once Gash dared to speak to her, once when the dimming orbs opened a second time.

"You have done me one good office, sir," she said softly, "there is only one other thing in which you can pleasure me."

"In what?" gasped the stricken man. "If it were only my life——"

"It is but to take your arm from under my head," she whispered.

Instead, he bent his forehead upon hers and wept, for he had not strength to obey. Her eye-lids closed, she opened them again, with a little startled cry; they fell once more, the lips parted, a quiver passed through the form so foully won, so madly loved by that unhappy man; the eternal spirit leaped to its source and left the casket in his nerveless hands.

Dear lady of the vanished time, may the earth lie lightly on thee.

That very night while the mistress of the woful house lay downstairs amid tapers and autumn flowers, and the faithful company of peasant women who had dared to venture there, to pay the last tribute of their gratitude for intentions alone, the man by whose hand she died, stood loading a pistol, and he was wadding the bullet with the fragment of a woman's glove.

The place was silent, but at the further wing there was the murmur of voices, Thorncroft having forbidden his rascals to leave that quarter. The house was very still, but had it been filled with the devil's riot of the past week, it would not have dulled the voices of dead and gone years whispering in that man's ear. He had loaded the long, silvered barrel carefully, and as he now shook some powder in the pan, started, hearing a slight noise on the uncarpeted floor of the corridor outside.

With a most incongruous caution, he went to the door, unlocked it and looked out, not going beyond the threshold.

"Not a soul!" he muttered. "I thought to have seen her there, looking at me!" He slowly closed the door, watching the band of light thrown by the guttering candle proportionately diminish. "Good-bye," he whispered to

the darkness. "Good-bye; God forgive. Irene! I come!"

Life was sweet he found as he stood on the threshold, it had a charm which he thought never could touch him again, and it was with a heavy sigh he took up the pistol. He was not afraid, but the act could not be reversed. Living had grown a burden and a shame, but what of that other life? Oh for one fleeting word, one faintest whisper to say if it was what priests declared, or merely merciful oblivion.

Bah, he would go and discover for himself as the great hearts of antiquity had done; as Saul when the chariot wheels of the hated foe were rattling in his ears. But, to go thus, self-judged, self-condemned, a liar and a cheat!

He closed his eyes and put the muzzle of the pistol to his heart.

THE END

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